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BAT 21: A CASE STUDY

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL STANLEY L. BUSBOOM
United States Air Force

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and the lessons learned from them are all detailed in this case study. The case study is built on official documents and publications, plus an oral historical interview with Colonel Hambleton. The lessons learned range from individual preparation, to the requirement for better aircraft capabilities, and the need for better decisionmaking processes for the combat search and rescue mission. A review of current rescue concepts is undertaken and compared to the historical context of Hambleton's incident. Observations are made that mission and capability may be mismatched at present, and that conventional search and rescue task force operations may be prohibited by future battlefield environments. A review of both the book and film, Bat 21, made about Colonel Hambleton's story is appended, as is a transcript of the above mentioned interview. 116

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BAT 21: A CASE STUDY
AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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2 April 1990

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ABSTRACT

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On Easter Sunday, 2 April 1972, Lt Col Icaal "Gene" Hambleton was shot down just South of the demilitarized zone in Vietnam. Six days of massive effort to extract him with conventional air rescue forces failed. For five more days, he evaded the enemy on a course relayed to him in the disguise of golf course holes. His saga ended with a daring special forces rescue, but also with an enormous cost in men and material. These events, their cost, and the lessons learned from them are all detailed in this case study. The case study is built on official documents and publications, plus an oral history interview with Colonel Hambleton. The lessons learned range from individual preparation, to the requirement for better aircraft capabilities, and the need for better decision making processes for the combat search and rescue mission. A review of current rescue concepts is undertaken and compared to the historical context of Hambleton's incident. Observations are made that mission and capability may be mismatched at present, and that conventional search and rescue task force operations may be prohibited by future battlefield environments. A review of both the book and film made about Colonel Hambleton's story is appended, as is a transcript of the above mentioned interview.

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* These maps are adapted from Ngo Quang Truong, *The Easter Offensive of 1972*, pp. 26, 28. (Public Domain)

All other illustrations are original work.

BAT 21: A CASE STUDY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Bat 21 is the story of Lieutenant Colonel Iceal E. "Gene" Hambleton's extraordinary evasion and eventual escape from the clutches of a division of North Vietnamese soldiers. This 53 year old navigator became the focus of the largest search and rescue operation ever mounted for one man during the Vietnam War. He spent eleven and a half days behind enemy lines after his EB-66 aircraft (call-sign: "Bat 21") was blasted out of the sky by surface to air missiles on Easter Sunday, 2 April, 1972. With a lot of help and heroic effort, he lived through the ordeal and was awarded The Silver Star, The Distinguished Flying Cross, The Air Medal, and The Purple Heart.¹

This is a great war story--good enough to become a best selling book and a feature film. William C. Anderson wrote Hambleton's story in Bat 21, a book that accurately chronicles the story's events as: "One of the great true adventures of the Vietnam War."² Anderson's book was brought to the screen in a Peter Markle adventure film of the same name, starring Gene Hackman as Hambleton, and Danny Glover as a composite character of the forward air controllers who guided Hambleton to his rescue.³ This paper will not retell the story represented in these popular accounts, but rather study the case for the purpose of learning lessons relevant to military professionals with an interest in combat search and rescue or escape and evasion. Gene Hambleton's story is worthy of a second look by the military professional not only as a remarkable adventure, but also as a true account of the valor and comradeship that occurs in battle.

THE CASE STUDY

The elements of Hambleton's story that are pertinent to this study are reconstructed as far as is practicable from official documents or accounts drawn from material contemporary to the actual events. The setting for the case is drawn, followed by accounts of both the search and rescue and the escape and evasion segments of the story. An analysis follows in two parts. First, the cost of the mission in military terms is assessed. A discussion of the lessons learned from the case follows, including Hambleton's own version of the lessons he drew from the experience. Finally, a review of current rescue concepts is undertaken, and a few conclusions are offered to emphasize the key points emerging from the case study.

ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Central to the success of this case study was the availability of primary and secondary sources so the research did not rest solely on the previously mentioned popular accounts. To this end, unit histories and unit commander end-of-tour reports proved to be valuable primary references. A particularly versatile type of secondary source was found in USAF Office of History publications, monographs, and specific contemporary accounts of combat operations. Problematic in using this material is the unavoidable introduction of military jargon, acronyms, and abbreviations. Appendix 1 to this paper is a glossary for the reader to use in self defense when and if that presents a problem.

The chief limitation of a case study approach based on official sources is that a complete view of events is never achieved; Hambleton's perspective from the ground would not be adequately covered. Anderson's Bat 21 probably does the best job of that and is prerequisite reading to any serious

application of this paper. For reasons of accuracy and authenticity, the film Bat 21 cannot be recommended to serve this purpose. A more complete treatment of both the book and film is offered in Appendix 2. The method used to overcome this limitation and round out the case study was to interview the principal in the events--Lt Col Hambleton. An edited and annotated transcript of the interview is provided at Appendix 3. This interview provides not only a more complete picture of events, but also an excellent bed of source material and some insight into the man who lived the story.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Iceal E. "Gene" Hambleton was born on 16 November 1918, which accounts for his considerably above average age for combat aircrew duty in Vietnam. He served in World War II and after a break in service, returned to fly 43 combat missions in Korea. A radar navigator by trade, he flew on bombers for many years before changing career fields into missile operations. He returned to the air in 1971 and flew 63 combat missions out of Korat Air Base, Thailand before being shot down.⁴ (A general map of Southeast Asia, showing Korat and other locations referred to in the text, is at Figure 1.) Since retiring from the Air Force, Colonel Hambleton has remained active in sharing his experiences with a new generation of military professionals, and was instrumental to this case study by generously sharing his time and thoughts.⁵

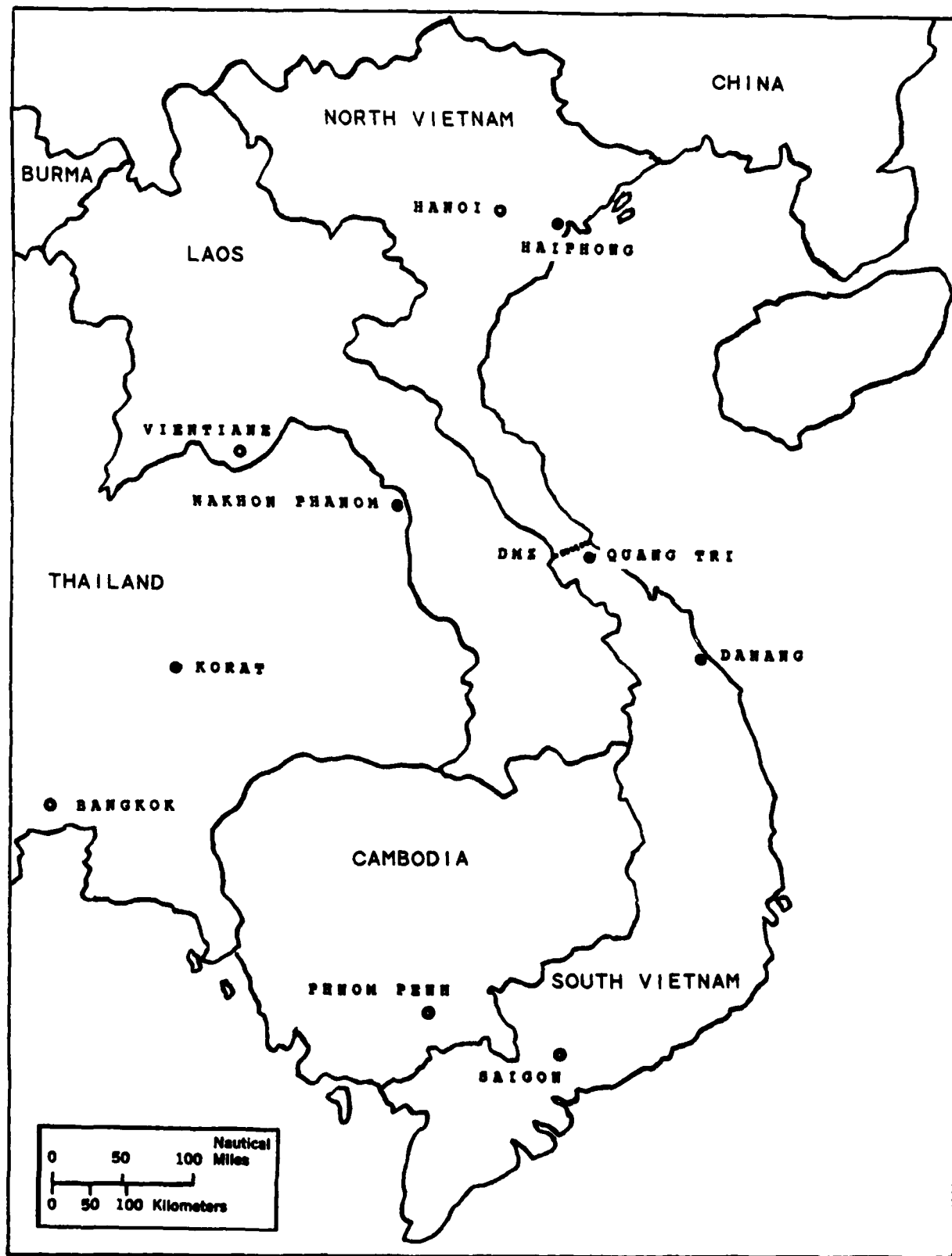


Illustration # 1: Overview Map of Southeast Asia

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER I

1. Biographical Sketch of LtCol Iceal E. "Gene" Hambleton, undated.
2. William C. Anderson, *Bat 21*, liner notes.
3. Peter Markle, director, *Bat 21*, the film.
4. Biographical Sketch.
5. Interview with Iceal E. Hambleton, LtCol, USAF (Ret). (Hereafter referred to as *Interview*, with page numbers correlating to Appendix 3 of this paper.)

CHAPTER II

THE CASE SETTING

The Bat 21 episode does not start with Colonel Hambleton being shot down. It starts first with his training, and then proceeds for seven months of combat flying before the final mission. Both the way he was trained and the way he fought had a lot to do with how he was shot down, and how he survived. More important yet was the fact that he was flying into the Spring Invasion of 1972 and facing surface to air missiles (SAMs) South of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) for the first time.

TRAINING FOR THE WAR

After 10 years in missiles, Hambleton needed to check out in an aircraft new to him--the EB-66. In about six months of upgrade training at Shaw AFB, South Carolina, Hambleton and other new EB-66 crew members achieved proficiency in the aircraft.¹ Perhaps more importantly, they had checked out with people who had "been there" and learned the not so subtle difference between Strategic Air Command (SAC) operations and Tactical Air Command (TAC) combat flying.² The differences between the two commands constitute a well known rivalry in the Air Force, but in this context their operational differences had been held up as issues of life or death earlier in the war.³

After completing water survival training at Turkey Run, Florida, Hambleton's next stop was Clark AB, Philippines, for what he called "snake school." He recalls the training as being geared specifically to Vietnam with escape and evasion training as well as survival basics.⁴ In fact, the Pacific Air Command (PACAF) Jungle Survival School had been operating for

six years, training aircrews enroute to Southeast Asia (SEA) in search and rescue procedures, evasion, and escape techniques, as well as survival. This concentrated school was highly praised by rescued airmen, and was supplemented with in-country training by unit life support sections.⁵

Hambleton's in-country survival training was limited to the standard ejection seat refresher training, and his flying orientation was similarly casual. He had one orientation ride to check out the countryside on the radar scopes and then went to work.⁶ This approach can be put down to his experience level; Hambleton was the senior officer in a group of senior navigators, had been a radar operator since 1945 in six or seven different systems, and in his own words, "...there's not a hell of a lot they could tell me about a radar scope...".⁷ As far he was concerned, he was fully qualified, and he started flying combat missions almost immediately.

FIGHTING THE WAR

The target areas of North Vietnam were numbered in route packages from one, in the South, to six in the North--including Hanoi and Haiphong (see Figure 2). Generally speaking, the target difficulty, length of mission and intensity of defenses increased with the numerical value of the route package. For those who regularly flew "downtown" to Hanoi in the "six pack," the route one area just North of the DMZ was a milk run--a simple, easy mission.⁸ The EB-66s frequently flew in route package one along the DMZ. As stand-off electronic countermeasure platforms, they supported attack packages from 30 thousand feet by electronically defeating SAMs or radar controlled anti-aircraft artillery (AAA). Although they knew there was a fair chance of eventually being shot down, they viewed their own job as a series of milk runs.⁹

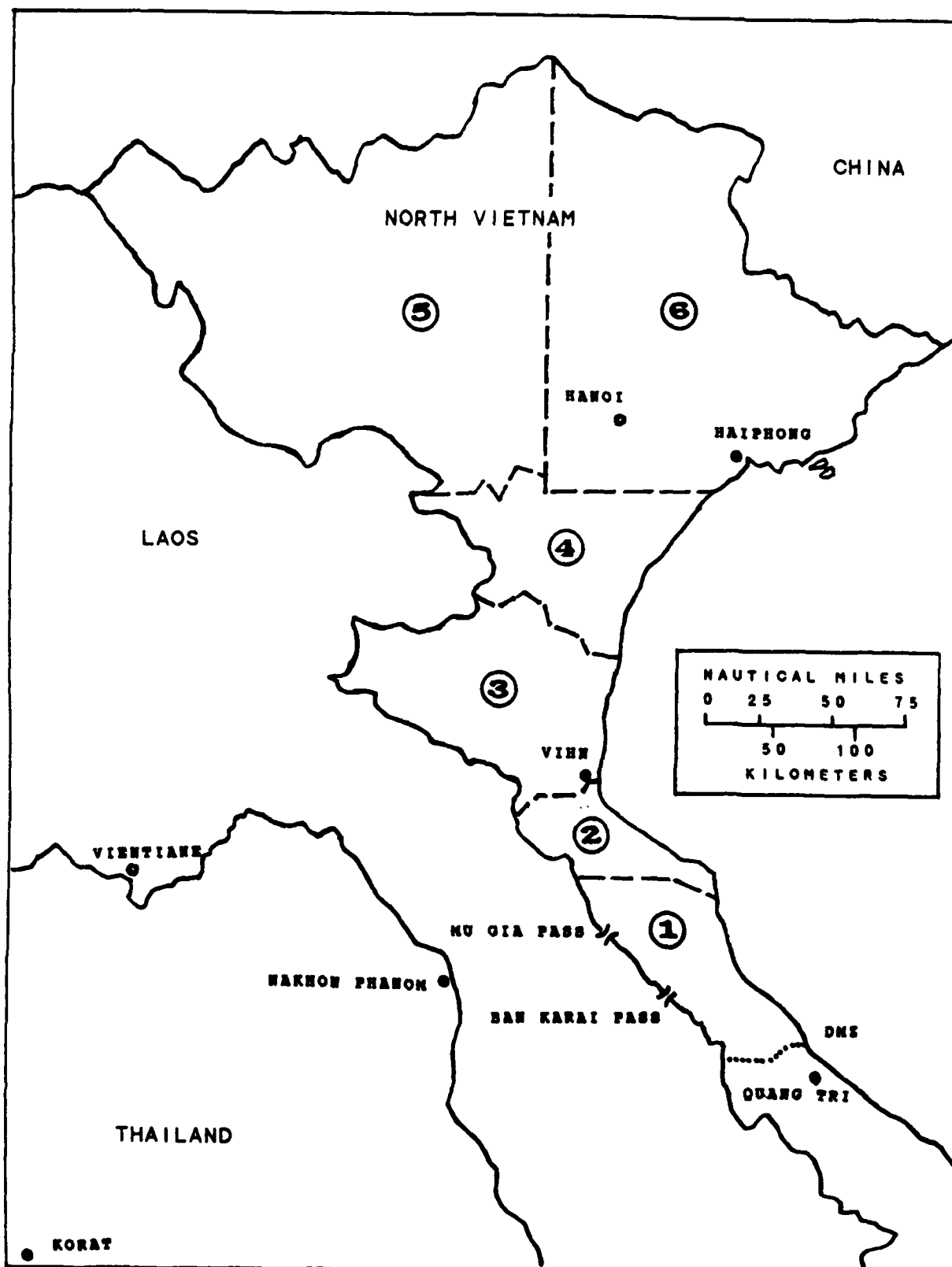


Illustration # 2: Route Packages in North Vietnam

What passed for an easy mission in Vietnam may seem more dangerous in retrospect. Part of the EB-66's role was "trolling" for SAMs at an altitude just 7 or 8 thousand feet under an ARC LIGHT mission (B-52 bombing formation), trying to rile or rattle the sites into launching.¹⁰ If electronic counter-measures did not defeat the SAM, they would insure it was locked in on their EB-66 and not the B-52s, count to ten after the launch (to allow the missile to get up to 25 thousand feet), then nose over into a SAM break. This violent maneuver was a tight diving turn designed to rapidly change direction and quickly build up gravitational forces (G's). The EB-66 was well suited for the mission and could get into a five G break in a hurry while the SAM's guidance system gyroscopes would tumble at just over two G's as it tried to follow, and the missile would shoot off at nothing. In Hambleton's words: "We'd giggle and laugh and drop down to about 10 thousand feet, then come up and let them shoot another one at us."¹¹

Having resorted to the SAM break successfully over 100 times, Hambleton and his crew were either feeling complacent, or invincible, or both after 63 missions.¹² The day the war caught up to them, they were flying a typical profile at the close of the Commando Hunt VII air interdiction campaign.¹³ The targets were in route package one: the Ban Kari and Mu Ghia passes.¹⁴ These passes were on the Laotian border in the lower North Vietnam panhandle (see Figure 2). Usually lucrative target areas, they were choke points on the Ho Chi Minh trail during the dry season, and supply stockpiles when the wet season closed the trails over the Laotian plains.¹⁵ This time of year brought the change in seasons and it was a good time to catch the North Vietnamese in transition at the mountain passes. As it turned out, they were not stockpiling for infiltration through Laos--they had a somewhat more ambitious plan in mind.

THE SPRING INVASION OF 1972

Spring of 1972 brought an early monsoon and about 30 thousand North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars to Quang Tri province. Actually, much of South Vietnam and all of Military Region 1 was invaded, but it was the 30 March thrust across and around the DMZ that was going to directly affect Hambleton. (Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the scope of the invasion and its rapid development.) The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) was not prepared for the assault and by 2 April, they had been pushed back to a defensive perimeter around the provincial capital of Quang Tri.¹⁶ Part of the ground lost in the first days of the invasion was a rice paddy by the village of Cam Lo, where Hambleton's parachute would eventually carry him.¹⁷

Coming south with the stream of invaders was a formidable air defense capability in the form of 23mm, 37mm, 57mm, and 100mm AAA along with, for the first time ever, SAM sites in South Vietnam.¹⁸ The presence of SAMs, armor, and 130mm field guns were all clear indications of the large scale, combined arms nature of the invasion.¹⁹ The air defense build up had started in January and progressed to the point where, "...allied pilots reported that the intensity of fire near the DMZ was equal to that encountered during earlier raids in the Hanoi area."²⁰ The milk runs of route package one were over.

The fact that SAMs had been forward deployed was not news to Hambleton and his crew. He had been plotting one site on the DMZ off and on for two months, but the Wing headquarters did not take it as a serious threat because there were no launches.²¹ The Wing, and particularly Hambleton's unit (the 42nd Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron), had good intelligence on where the active SAMs were, but they did not necessarily connect their forward presence with a potential invasion.²² In a cat and mouse game of

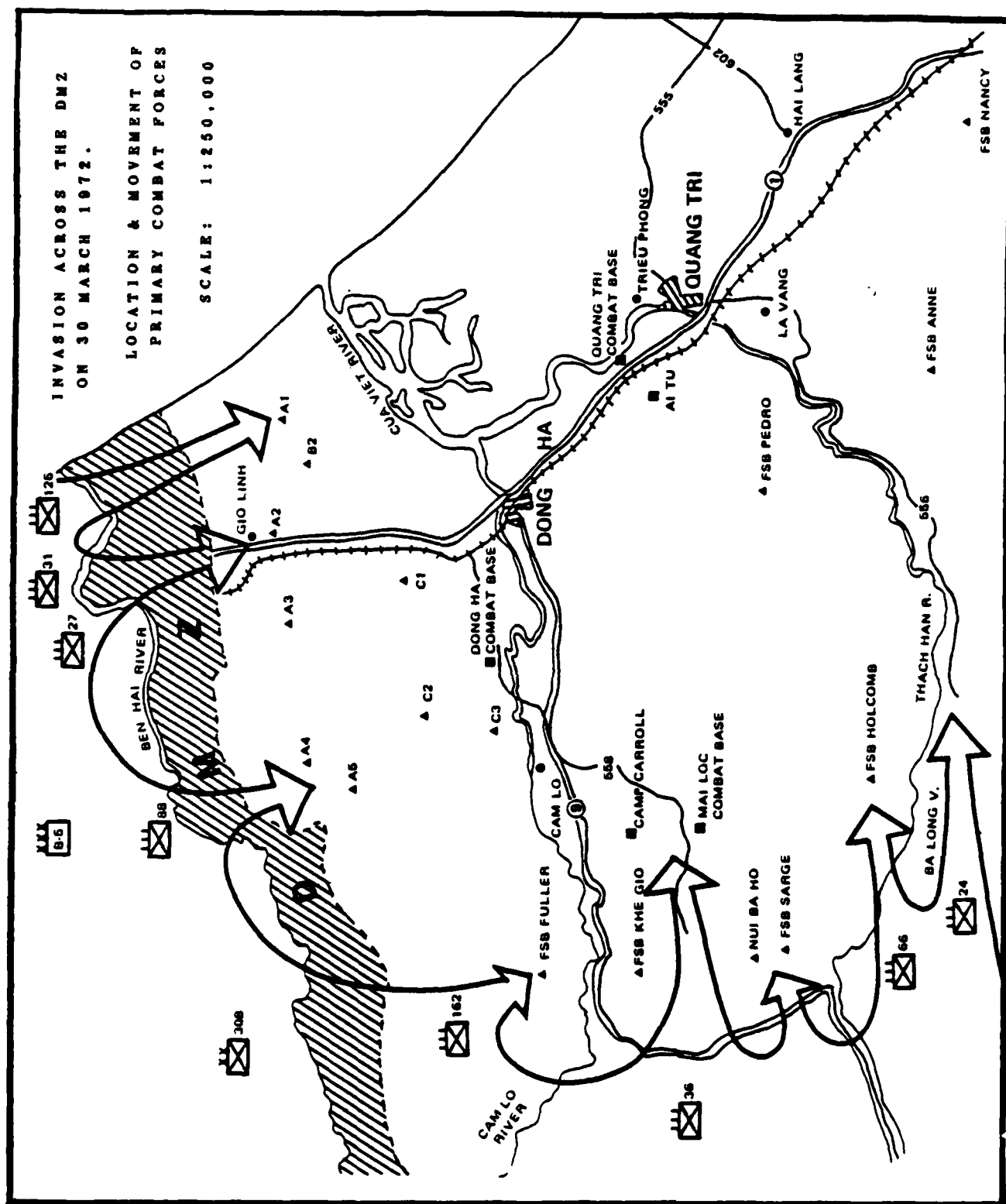


Illustration # 3: Spring Invasion of 1972: Situation, 30 March

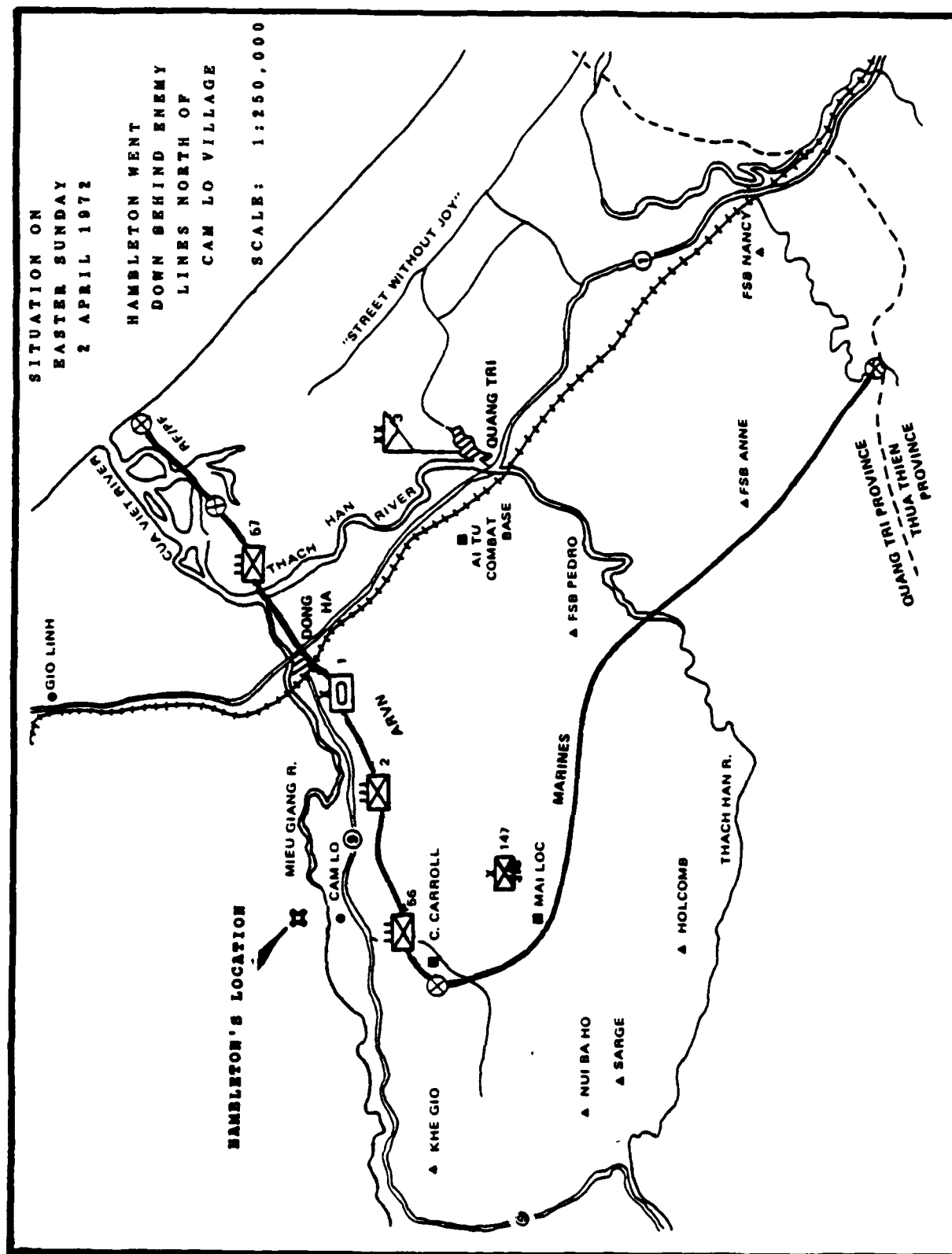


Illustration # 4: Spring Invasion of 1972: Situation, 2 April

electronic warfare, the shadow SAM site was using its aquisition radar but not firing its missiles, and had succeeded over a period of weeks in being ignored as a threat. For Hambleton and his crew, this would be an unfortunate oversight.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER II

1. Interview, p. 66.
2. Ibid.
3. Jack Boughton, *Going Downtown*, pp. 102-107. Boughton's discussion is heavily biased in favor of TAC operations; both of his books were written on the premise that a SAC dominated higher command gravely misunderstood basic tactical realities in the SEA air war. Nevertheless, it provides a clear explanation of the roots and results of the SAC/TAC dispute.
4. Interview, p. 66.
5. Capt David G. Francis and Maj David R. Nelson, *Search and Rescue Operations in Southeast Asia: 1 April 1972-30 June 1973*, pp. 29-30.
6. Interview, p. 67.
7. Ibid.
8. Boughton, *Going Downtown*, pp. 109-110, 133-134.
9. Interview, p. 65.
10. Ibid., pp. 69-70.
11. Ibid., p. 70.
12. Ibid., p. 69.
13. Capt David K. Mann, *The 1972 Invasion of Military Region I: Fall of Quang Tri and Defense of Hue*, p. 10.
14. Interview, pp. 68-69.
15. *The Effects and Impact of Air Power: Vietnam, 1965-1968*, Vol I, pp. 7-4 - 7-6.
16. Ngo Quang Truong, *The Easter Offensive of 1972*, pp. 24-29.
17. Earl H. Tilford, Jr., *Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia, 1961-1975*, p. 117.
18. Maj A. J. C. Lavalley, *Airpower in the 1972 Spring Invasion*, pp. 34-35.
19. Truong, p. 23.
20. Lavalley, p. 34.
21. Interview, p. 68.
22. Ibid.

CHAPTER III

SEARCH AND RESCUE

In the Bat 21 episode, there is no search and there is no rescue. As it happened, Colonel Hambleton was located while he was still airborne in his parachute and, despite heroic effort, conventional rescue forces never reached him. The failure of a huge USAF search and rescue task force to pluck Hambleton off the battlefield is a central point in a saga that begins with the loss his EB-66 to enemy air defenses.

THE SHOOT-DOWN

As the squadron staff navigator, Hambleton had the ironic opportunity to schedule himself for his last mission.¹ The briefing was normal, including the SAM break procedures of counting off against successful launches and breaking right (South), away from the threat.² That was the last normal thing in Hambleton's life for over 12 days.

The first SAM signals were puzzling to Hambleton. The crew normally got two discreet warnings from the power signals at the site before a launch was confirmed. This day, both preliminary signals were absent and the launch warning (usually the last in the sequence) was the first and only warning the crew got.³ The timing count was started for a right break but electronic warfare officers shouted, "negative, negative," because they saw the SAM was tracking at them from the South, not the North. The pilot dumped the controls away to the left, but they were hit in mid-break.⁴

The crew of call-sign Bat 21 had been caught five seconds late and looking in the wrong direction. The speed of the invasion had not been foreseen and the swift movement of SAMs South of the DMZ gave the gunners

the element of surprise. Probably more fatal was a shift in tactics: the North Vietnamese stole a five second lead on Bat 21 by launching the missile optically at the EB-66's contrails, thereby avoiding emitting power signals from their acquisition radar.⁵ The guidance system was updated in flight and the SAM successfully homed in on Bat 21.

Hambleton knew the guys in the back were lost when the SAM detonated and he ran through his ejection sequence on the pilot's signal. He fully expected to see the aircraft commander follow, but a second explosion rocked the air, disintegrating the aircraft and putting Hambleton into a spin.⁶ He had to open his parachute at 29 thousand feet to stop the spin and prevent a black-out. That gave him a sixteen minute parachute ride and two strokes of good fortune. First, he contacted a forward air controller (FAC) pilot operating well below him. The FAC climbed to his altitude and orbited with him to the ground, getting a good fix on his landing location. Second, a low fog bank rolled in as he descended, screening his landing from the thousands of enemy troops in the area.⁷ Hambleton was on the ground and on his own until a search and rescue task force could be formed. Combat rescue attempts in hostile territory were a race against the clock in SEA, and Hambleton's clock had started.⁸

RESCUE EFFORTS

The first fifteen minutes on the ground was a critical period to a downed aircrew--they were told to evade the enemy and stay off the radio.⁹ Hambleton did manage to evade the enemy, but he did not stay off the air. Two A-1E Skyraiders, call-signs Sandy 07 and 08, heard the FAC's emergency calls and diverted to cover Hambleton's position. As the Sandys bombed and strafed enemy troops within 100 meters of him, Hambleton called off

positions of fire, noted the ordnance effects, and called adjustments to the pilots. In this critical period, "...he saved his own life by maintaining his cool."¹⁰ Meanwhile, the FAC had organized the first rescue attempt by departing the area and calling for assistance from anyone airborne.

The FAC returned with a small armada of U.S. Army helicopters: two gunships and two slicks (UH-1H Hueys). This ad hoc rescue attempt ended in disaster with one chopper and crew lost to heavy ground fire, and a gunship battle damaged and forced down.¹¹ Hambleton had no alternative at nightfall but to abandon his hiding place in the rice paddy and move to safer, more remote spot in the jungle nearby. He dug in for the night and waited for a ride out in the morning.¹²

First light rescues attempted to achieve surprise and economy of force by arriving at the objective right at dawn, getting in and out without the need to blast through with suppressive fire.¹³ Such an attempt by two Jolly Greens (HH-53 rescue helicopters were called Jolly Green Giants and used the call-sign "Jolly") on 3 April was aborted well before the objective when intense ground fire damaged the choppers and forced them out of the area.¹⁴ Hambleton's expectations for a morning pick up were shattered and things got worse before they got better. An OV-10 FAC coming on station to watch over Bat 21 was downed by a SAM; one pilot was captured while the other was evading in an area not far from Hambleton.¹⁵ Now there were two men on the ground and the hostile fire was getting worse.

Nevertheless, the men of the 37th Air Rescue and Recovery Squadron (ARRS) planned another attempt. A standard rescue package was formed: tactical air would pound the area prior to the pick up while a flight of four Sandys provided protective fire for the helicopters on ingress and egress. One Jolly Green would go in low for the pick up while one flew high

for back up.¹⁶ This concept, which had worked so often in Vietnam, did not account for the strength of the ground forces. Like the Bat 21 crew before them, the 37th ARRS crews did not understand the depth and intensity that the invasion had reached.¹⁷ The plan was to dash in, pick up Hambleton, and in a continuation of the egress, pick up the downed FAC pilot on the same run.¹⁸

The attempt did not come off according to plan:

Jolly 62 got across the river safely, but as they started to go for Bat-21, they came under fire from the village. Jolly 62 was really getting hosed down--they started to turn right for the village, when somebody in the helicopter pressed down on the radio transmit button. The FAC and the Sandys were screaming "turn left, don't turn right, turn left." But Jolly 62 couldn't hear because that mike button was down. The right turn put them into more heavy machine gun fire...¹⁹

The net result was the loss of six brave airmen, but no rescue.²⁰ Conventional rescue had failed to bring Hambleton out and although there were those still willing to try, he got the word from the FAC the next day that there would be no further attempts.²¹ All he had left was his own wits and the gear packed in his survival vest.

THE TOOLS OF SURVIVAL

It is unlikely Hambleton could have survived this ordeal without a few key pieces of equipment. Hambleton recollection of what he carried squares fairly well with an official list of equipment contemporaneous with his shoot-down: Two radios, a first aid kit, water bottle, two kinds of flares, a knife and a .38 caliber revolver.^{22,23} Conspicuously absent was food and water, although he did have a compass and map. Within this assortment of gear, Hambleton is adamant that the radios were the key to his survival. He called the URC-64 survival radio "...one of the greatest pieces of equipment the Air Force has ever made."²⁴

Chief among the qualities cited to justify this praise was that his batteries lasted more than twelve days in heavy use without going dead. It was his lifeline to the FACs during the rescue attempts and later during his evasion. At night, in bad weather, or when he was in dense cover, the FACs would pinpoint his location using a series of transmissions from the survival radio and the Pave Nail precision LORAN gear (navigation aid) onboard their OV-10 aircraft.²⁵ The use of the radio pervades the account of Hambleton's evasion and it would be difficult to overestimate its value to him and his benefactors. His own estimate was: "The radio was the key in my situation. Without that radio, I was dead! ...if I had known then what I know now, I'd have taken that radio to bed with me every night."²⁶

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER III

1. Interview, p. 67.
2. Ibid., pp. 67-68.
3. Ibid., p. 69.
4. Ibid., p. 70.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 71.
7. Ibid., pp. 71-72.
8. Francis and Nelson, p. 50-51.
9. Ibid., p. 36-37.
10. Lavalley, p. 37.
11. Ibid., p. 39.
12. Interview, p. 73.
13. Francis and Nelson, p. 36.
14. Lt Harry L. Holliday, *History of the 37th Air Rescue and Recovery Squadron: 1 April-30 June 1972*, p. 14.
15. Lavalley, p. 40.
16. Francis and Nelson, p. 34.
17. Col Cecil N. Muirhead, *End of Tour Report*, p. 7.
18. Lavalley, p. 41.
19. Ibid., p. 41-42.
20. Maj Kenneth E. Ernest, *History of the 3rd Air Rescue and Recovery Group, 1 April-30 June 1972*, pp. 5-8.
21. Interview, p. 77.
22. Ibid., pp. 73-74.
23. Francis and Nelson, p. 36.
24. Interview, p. 74.

25. Lavalley, p. 39. LORAN (Long Range Aid to Navigation) was state of the art location finding equipment at this point in the war. Pave Nail was a nickname for the particular LORAN used by the FACs. The importance of this system for search and rescue was the pinpoint locations possible in bad weather, night and dense foilage as mentioned in the text, but also--the location of downed airmen could be ascertained without popping smoke or using flares, which would be a dead give away to the enemy. The use of Pave Nail was, of course, dependent on a functional survival radio in the hands of the evading aircrew.

26. Interview, p. 74.

CHAPTER IV

EVASION AND ESCAPE

Colonel Hambleton's prized survival radio was more or less a hotline to the FACs, who orbited over him providing instructions and encouragement. They stuck with him while conventional rescue attempts were made and while he hid out from the enemy. Eventually, they directed him on a unique course of movement based on golf course holes, and shepherded him to a successful escape. When Hambleton's options became limited to evasion and escape, the FACs became essential to his survival.

THE FORWARD AIR CONTROLLERS

In the book and the film, there is only one FAC: he is a composite character devised by the author Anderson to represent the many pilots who flew on the Bat 21 rescue mission.¹ The actual arrangement to achieve 24 hour-a-day coverage was 6 separate FACs flying 4 hour shifts out of either Da Nang (call signs: Covey and Bilk) or Nakhon Phanom (call-sign: Nail).^{2,3} The aircraft were predominately OV-10s (not O-2s, as the film and book portray). Some of the real FACs included Captain Jimmie D. Kempton, who followed Hambleton's chute down and arranged the rescue attempt with Army helicopters. Captains Rocky O. Smith and Richard M. Atchison crewed the OV-10 that gave Hambleton his wake-up calls and established a no-fire zone around him. Nail 38 was the FAC mission that was shot down over Bat 21, and crewman Lieutenant Clark successfully evaded in the same manner as Hambleton. Clark's cockpit mate, Captain Henderson, was captured.⁴

Besides directing traffic over Hambleton's head and calling in suppression strikes on the enemy, the FACs played a key role supporting

Hambleton through the worst moments of his ordeal. When the early rescue attempts failed materialize, Hambleton was ready to quit; he never said those words, but the FAC could hear it in his voice. That was the first time the lieutenant in the air told the colonel in the mud who was in charge.⁵ From then on, Hambleton accepted the FACs as his coach, wavering again only when the Jolly Green rescue chopper was shot down in front of him. In Hambleton's own words:

I hate to see grown men cry, but I was a 53 year old lieutenant colonel and I cried...because here's six guys out there, giving their all to pull my butt out of there, and all at once, boom, they're gone. But again, the forward air controller came up on the radio and gave me a sermon you wouldn't believe. I made up my mind then, "Hell, I'm going to get out of here, regardless...."⁶

Hambleton did get out of there by evading; first he hid and then he ran.

HIDING OUT

Hambleton successfully camouflaged a hole in the ground on the brushy jungle knoll he had chosen, and lived there for seven days and six nights. Two times he risked exposure to forage for food, and the second time out he was nearly discovered and had difficulty finding his way back.⁷ Once, he was spotted by a boy with a dog, who promptly returned with an armed party to search for him. Twice during this period, patrols passed within 20 feet of his hole.⁸

One of the reasons Hambleton could stick it out for seven days in hiding was the massive air to ground suppression being used to keep the enemy away. The Sandys were constantly sowing "gravel" (anti-personnel mine bomblets) around his position and in one case, a FAC resorted to shooting marker rockets to keep the enemy patrols at bay.⁹ One time a B-52 ARC LIGHT mission was used and Hambleton felt he was as likely to have been blown up as the enemy.¹⁰ One suppression run, not publicized at the time, was a

CBU-30A attack (a cluster bomb unit, filled with tear gas).¹¹ It worked; the enemy did not get to Hambleton, but he was livid with the FAC over his own experience in the gas cloud.¹² The bottom line had been reached: rescue was not viable and suppression of the enemy was getting too risky and difficult. Hambleton had to get on the move.

THE GOLF MATCH

A plan was hatched to walk Hambleton out of hiding and to a river where he could move downstream to meet a special forces rescue team (See Figure 5). Well known in the Air Force as an avid golfer, the idea was to direct Hambleton through the jungle based on his detailed knowledge of golf course holes. The specific hole named gave him direction and distance, the two key elements in walking a compass leg, while baffling the enemy as to the meaning of the transmissions.¹³ Communicating with downed flyers in codes established on personal knowledge was nothing new in the search and rescue business, but Hambleton's "golf match" through the jungle carried it to a glorious new level. While this probably worked due to his navigational skills and unique memory for golf courses, it still was not easy.

In the course of walking out, Hambleton had to pick his way through the minefields that had been protecting him. To save time, he moved at night through the same village that hid the guns that shot down his would be rescuers. Although the site had been pounded with ordnance, there was at least one Vietnamese left in it. Hambleton got into an altercation with him that was settled at knife point in the old navigator's favor.¹⁴ His other misadventures included getting lost in a bannana grove less than 150 yards from the river, dropping his survival radio and having to search for it, and tumbling off a cliff, breaking his arm.¹⁵ Hambleton finally crossed the

river only a few minutes ahead of his pursuers, and spent several uncomfortable days floating downriver. This was not a routine golf match.

ESCAPE AND RECOVERY

The first American Hambleton saw in 12 days was U.S. Navy Lieutenant Thomas R. Norris. Norris had two days earlier led a patrol that rescued the downed FAC pilot, Lieutenant Clark. After two aborted attempts to reach Hambleton with his SEAL team, Norris took one Vietnamese and disguised as fishermen, they moved deep behind enemy lines. He found Hambleton, and exfiltrated him back through enemy lines in a sampan. Lt Norris' efforts cannot be overestimated: he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for these daring and successful unconventional rescues.¹⁶

Hambleton moved on to a field hospital in DaNang to be treated for multiple injuries including flak wounds, a fractured arm, cuts on his arms and legs, a knife wound on his back, and advancing cases of dehydration and malnutrition. There was no single life threatening injury, but Hambleton had been slowing down every day and was just about out of gas when he was found.¹⁷ He made a stop at his home base of Korat, where he could not "buy a dinner or a drink," before convalescing for 30 days in the Hospital at Clark AB.¹⁸ Hambleton's ordeal was over. It would become a source of inspiration for many, but others would ask, fairly and with justification, was it worth it?

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER IV

1. Anderson, pp. 219-220.
2. Interview, p. 84.
3. Lavalley, p. 39.
4. Ibid., pp. 36-41.
5. Interview, pp. 75-76.
6. Ibid., p. 76.
7. Ibid., pp. 76-77. (See also, Anderson at p. 91.)
8. Ibid., p. 79. (See also, Anderson at pp. 59-64.)
9. Ibid., p. 80. (See also, Anderson at pp. 20, 64-65, 106-108.)
10. Anderson, pp. 92-95.
11. Tilford, p. 95.
12. Interview, pp. 80-81.
13. Ibid., p. 77.
14. Ibid., pp. 77-78.
15. Ibid., pp. 78-79.
16. *America's Medal of Honor Recipients: Complete Official Citations*, pp. 117-118. In addition to the daring rescues of Hambleton and Clark, Norris was cited for action in and around his forward operating base. Seriously wounded later in the war and permanently injured, Norris has for whatever good reasons been reticent to have his own story told in a popular account. He appears in Anderson's *Bat 21* as a Marine LtCol named Morris, but his character does not appear in Markle's film *Bat 21* at all. As alluded to in the text, all of Hambleton's remarkable evasion was a moot effort without Norris' rescue plan and its bold execution.
17. Interview, pp. 84-85.
18. Ibid., p. 86.

CHAPTER V

THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS

The ultimate success of the Bat 21 rescue was clearly not without a significant cost. It was shadowed by loss of life, a heavy cost in material, and some would claim, a loss of initiative on the battlefield.¹ If there must be a cost versus reward comparison on a mission such as Bat 21, these categories will serve for the analysis.

LOSS OF LIFE IN THE LINE OF DUTY

When SAMs struck the Bat 21 EB-66, five men were lost; that is a sunk cost that precedes all others in this story.² On the same day, a UH-1H making a rescue attempt was gunned down with the loss of four lives.³ Two OV-10s went down to SAMs with two crewmembers lost, a third becoming a POW, and the fourth escaping.⁴ Six more lives (five crewmen and a combat photographer) were lost when the Jolly Green rescue chopper went down on the rescue attempt.⁵ There is no single authoritative source that accounts for all of these men together, or suggests other losses in Sandys or strike aircraft that flew on supporting missions. If the foregoing compilation is accepted, at least 17 combat deaths are relevant to the Bat 21 story.

From one perspective, the loss of these aviators may be the least problematic of the analysis. All were flying combat missions and were well aware of the risks involved in the line of duty. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that the UH-1H crew was not on a properly planned mission and was unduly put in harm's way. Similarly, the Jolly Green crew was sent in through withering fire--but then there was also a communication error in that sequence of events. In fact, there were no rules to judge what cost in

life was sufficient to justify abandoning a rescue mission.⁶

In the case of Bat 21, that judgment call was made after the loss of the rescue helicopter. The Air Rescue and Recovery Service unit commanders who were involved in this episode argued in their end-of-tour reports for a much lower threshold of air defense threat before the slow moving rescue aircraft were introduced.^{7,8} In a service where valor was common and the motto was "That Others May Live," the problem was not judge the men's courage or skill, but rather to judge on which missions those attributes should used.⁹

CONSUMPTION OF MATERIAL VERSUS THE MAINTENANCE OF MORALE

As many as 90 sorties a day were being flown in support of Hambleton.¹⁰ For comparison, peak daily sorties during the invasion for the entire Military Region 1 were 300, while the pre-invasion rate was as low as 10 per day.¹¹ In excess of 800 total strike sorties were eventually flown directly in support of Hambleton's rescue at the cost of eight aircraft destroyed and four seriously damaged.¹² There is little doubt why the Bat 21 incident is referred to as the largest and most costly search and rescue effort of the war. By any order of measurement, the loss of these aircraft and cost of the sustaining that daily sortie rate adds up to a huge bill.

If you accept that the purpose of search and rescue efforts is "...to secure the safety of the pilots as valuable military assets and to enhance their effectiveness by boosting morale,"¹³ then these costs may be in order. Add to that the factor in Vietnam "...that US personnel held as prisoners of war constituted a serious political liability to the US government,"¹⁴ and it is apparent that search and rescue was not measured in dollars alone.

The standard measurement of effort had evolved to the point of doing

anything and everything short of virtual impossibilities. Still, it was clear to the fighter pilots who flew "downtown" to Hanoi that if they went down in route package six, they were going in solo.¹⁵ There was just no feasible means to rescue people that deep in the North. Yet late in the war, in fact just after the Bat 21 mission, there was a daring raid into the North to successfully pick up a downed airman. Capt Locher, call-sign Oyster 1, was within 40 miles of Hanoi when he was shot down. Evading over 15 miles in 23 days, he was rescued on 2 June 1972, by a huge task force.¹⁶

The decision to go in that deep was made by the 7th Air Force Commander, General Vogt, and his logic is most pertinent to the analysis of cost:

I had to decide whether we should risk the loss of maybe a dozen airplanes and crews just to get one man out. Finally I said to myself, Goddamn it, the one thing that keeps our boys motivated is the certain belief that if they go down, we will do absolutely everything we can to get them out. If that is ever in doubt, morale would tumble. That was my major consideration. So I took it on myself. I didn't ask anybody for permission, I just said, "Go do it!"¹⁷

Locher got out at no cost in life, so the decision was easy to live with and Vogt had made his point about measuring the cost of such a mission.

THE BATTLEFIELD IMPACT

General Vogt's bold move begs one obvious question: what are the secondary effects on the battlefield when combat power is diverted in large quantities to a search and rescue mission? Actually, diversion of airborne assets to higher priority targets was standard fare in Vietnam and search and rescue took priority over almost all strike targets.¹⁸ The peculiar situation with the Bat 21 case was the massive and consistent amount of sorties diverted juxtaposed with enormous pressure from the enemy in the forward battle area. This competing requirement for air to ground missions

was enough to spark a heated and complex controversy.

When Hambleton was shot down, the standard 27km no-fire zone used in South Vietnam was established around him to prevent air or artillery fires from endangering him.¹⁹ This size was inappropriate to scope of the battle developing around Quang Tri and it was quickly and considerably reduced, but not before the seeds had been sown for a bitter debate. The essence of the argument was that the enemy invasion force was pouring through that gap (and other no-fire zones) and achieving significant local tactical advantages.²⁰ The root question was: is one man's safety worth giving such an opportunity to the enemy? The answer in the opinion of the U.S. advisors to the ARVN was clearly: no!²¹ The ranking advisor said: "When viewed in relation to all the events of the day, a worse decision could not have been made."²² Although this argument (i.e., one man's welfare versus a division's) is difficult to assail on face value, it is not clear that a no-fire zone made much difference one way or the other at that point in the battle.

POOR WEATHER AND POOR FIGHTING

First, the weather during the Bat 21 incident was generally poor and few effective close air support sorties could be flown during those two weeks.²³ From the beginning of the campaign, "...weather hampered effective FAC coverage and made it difficult to accurately identify ground situations from the air."²⁴ Second, the USAF was backfilling all tactical air control requirements in the absence of any effective South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) effort.²⁵ The VNAF FACs simply would not contact their ground controllers or, in some cases, even fly to assigned areas. USAF FACs were carrying the entire load.²⁶ As for a VNAF search and rescue capability that may have supported or even conducted the Bat 21 rescue mission--there

was nothing. The South Vietnamese had never made any effort to build such a capability.²⁷ The lack of a VNAF rescue or forward air control capability, and the bad weather, were still secondary problems to the havoc prevalent in the ARVN forces.

The 3rd ARVN Division was poorly disposed to fight the battle brought to it, and suffered early defeats at the hands of the invaders. As far as air support missions being hampered, a significant factor was:

...disorderly retreats of certain ARVN units. Since it was difficult for tactical aircraft to locate accurately friendly positions under those circumstances, large no-fire areas had to be established and this reduced the effectiveness of air support.²⁸

Another reason the 3rd ARVN Division was desperate for fire support was that they had lost most of their artillery fire bases in the opening days of the invasion. In two unfortunate instances, they had surrendered their batteries intact to the invaders.²⁹ An ARVN Corps commander who fought in the Spring Invasion of 1972 brings this observation to the debate:

In general, fire support available from U.S. and RVN sources was plentiful for I Corps [operating in Military Region 1] throughout the enemy offensive. But the judicious and timely use of it proved to be a difficult problem in coordination and control.³⁰

HAMBLETON'S VIEWPOINT

Hambleton followed the Vietnam war closely, and although he viewed the people as good people, and the soldiers as good fighters, he understood that they were fighting for individual survival, not for national victory.³¹ In contrast, he credits the American military man with the virtue of professionalism. He felt he was not abandoned in a near impossible situation because, when an American fighting man is in trouble, his peers will help him even at the risk of their own survival.³² He flatly rejects the idea that he was the subject of an aggressive rescue effort because of his rank,

but accepts that his access to sensitive information may have influenced events. As an officer with a strategic targeting background, he carried many valuable military secrets in his memory and he made his mind up early in the situation that he was not going to Hanoi with them.³³

As far as cost arguments go, Hambleton was very moved by the loss of the rescue helicopter crew but he also knew they were professionals, trying to accomplish a mission. Having flown for many years, and knowing what it cost just to get an airplane off the ground, he speculates that "...if the taxpayers and my neighbors knew what it cost to pull me out of there, they'd probably shoot me."³⁴ Although he was not aware of the no-fire zone controversy from his limited vantage point on the ground, he acknowledges that the effort to rescue him probably cost the ARVN considerably.³⁵ But in the balance, Hambleton credits the fraternity of the Air Force above all other factors. He describes this attitude: "I don't care whether you're a colonel or a private, as long as that man is down there...this is one of my buddies, let's go get him."³⁶

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER V

1. Francis and Nelson, p. 39.
2. Interview, p. 81.
3. Lavalley, p. 39. Neither this source nor any others found gives an account of total souls on board the lost UH-1H. Assuming a normal crew for a slick (pilot, copilot, crew chief, and gunner), the count has been set at four.
4. Ibid.
5. Ernest, pp. 5-8.
6. Tilford, p. 96.
7. Col William Mercer Harris, IV, *End of Tour Report*, p. 3.
8. Muirhead, p. 7.
9. Donald J. Mrozek, *Air Power and the Ground War in Vietnam*, p. 117.
10. Francis and Nelson, p. 38.
11. Troung, p. 75.
12. Muirhead, p. 7.
13. Mrozek, pp. 116-117.
14. Ibid., p. 116.
15. Jack Boughton, *Thud Ridge*, pp. 113-115.
16. Francis and Nelson, p. 40-41.
17. General John Vogt, quoted by Jeffery Ethell and Alfred Price, "Man on the Run," *Air Power History*, Fall 1989, pp. 45-46.
18. Tilford, p. 96.
19. Mann, p. 22.
20. Francis and Nelson, p. 39.
21. The USAF air liaison officer (ALO) to the 3rd ARVN Division was Maj David A. Brookbank. He is widely quoted in contemporary accounts as highly critical of the no-fire zones around Hambleton and Clark. His ALO report puts much of the blame for fire coordination difficulty on these no-fire zones. (see Mann, pp. 22-25; Francis and Nelson, p. 39; and Tilford, pp. 119-120) Although Brookbank's ALO report was accessible only in secondary sources, and attempts to reach him in person failed, contact was made with

Col G. H. Turley, USMCR (Ret). He was the senior U.S. advisor to the 3rd ARVN, and Brookbank's immediate superior in the field (and also the author of *The Easter Offensive*). Col Turley confirmed in a telephone conversation that the no-fire zones were indeed a problem, but added that the real root of the controversy was that they were established at Headquarters, 7th Air Force--not by the ground component commander facing the evasion force. For that reason, the no-fire zone decision overlooked such tactical basics as the bridge at Cam Lo (see figure 5, page 25) being left intact for NVA armor to cross.

22. Turley, *The Easter Offensive*, p. 201. Turley's account of the Bat 21 incident and the resultant no-fire zone controversy is at pages 200-205.

23. Troung, pp. 31, 38.

24. Mann, p. 24-25.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 18. (see also Turley, pp. 124-126.)

26. Lavalley, pp. 46-47.

27. Tilford, pp. 116-117.

28. Troung, pp. 75-76. (see also Mann, p. 25)

29. Turley, pp. 98-102, 164-172. (see also Troung, p. 27, 30)

30. Troung, p. 77.

31. Interview, p. 82.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

CHAPTER VI

LESSONS LEARNED

The Bat 21 episode is a natural for lesson learning. The principal player survived to tell about it and has developed his own version of the lessons learned. The events were a watershed case at the tactical level, leading to a new approach to high threat search and rescue. The incident even had impact at the operational level, where coordination issues of considerable magnitude were raised. Overarching each of these levels of interest was the high cost in men and material, which provides an incentive to find the right lessons, and to learn them well.

THE INDIVIDUAL LESSONS

Gene Hambleton knew his experience was unique, and the success of the book and film bears that out. He has consistently shared his story at the professional level by speaking to military audiences whenever possible. A few years ago, feeling he was losing focus on the important parts of his message, Hambleton came up with what he calls "The four P's." He has distilled his lessons learned at the individual level down to the elements of panic, planning, patience, and prayer.¹

Panic is the arch enemy of the downed flyer--or anyone else in a tight spot. Hambleton got through the first moments of his ordeal by the simple ability to perform the ejection sequence, open his parachute, and operate his radio. The rote training that was taken casually back at the base paid off with survival when the SAM hit. He freely admits he was terrorized when he was first on the ground, but observes that after about two days, fear was not a significant motivator. Hambleton understands panic the way few people

can, and he advises: "Don't do anything in haste, don't do anything rash--if you do, you're going to die."² Panic is fought first with training that allows you to act immediately without thinking, then kept in check with a deliberate effort to plan a sensible course of action.³

Hambleton's planning was done for him in the sense that the FACs gave him movement instructions, but he makes the key point that he had to make his mind up to go along with the plan. For six days, the plan was to hide in a hole and wait for a chopper. When that failed, he had to grasp the new plan as it was passed to him in the code of golf jargon. He also had to believe in it, despite the obviously long odds it entailed. Hambleton had been told in so many words that the air rescue was off and he had to either successfully evade, or risk capture or death. He chose to survive and in doing so, learned that a deliberate effort to plot out a rational course of action was essential--"If you start ad libbing, then boy, you're dead."⁴

Then he had to have the patience to let the plan develop. Hambleton went through the expectations of a quick pick-up after he was shot down, a first light rescue that never materialized, and a full blown search and rescue task force attempt that ended in disaster. He came at some point to understand that he was in it for the long haul, and that "...nothing [was] going to happen in the next three or four minutes."⁵ The virtue of patience does not come naturally to the military professional who is oriented toward action and likes to think their destiny is in their own hands. Patience is particularly difficult to practice when you are in a bad neighborhood like Hambleton was, but it provides the calmness to stem panic, and the time to think a plan through.

"Then, after everything else, you've always got one Person that I think you can depend on."⁶ Praying sustained Hambleton through his most difficult

times on the ground, and although every professional is entitled to approach this subject as he wishes, the concept of external help is essential. The books, speeches and testimonies of Vietnam POWs consistently emphasize this point and Hambleton adds his voice to the choir. At some point in a crisis of this magnitude, it may be necessary to admit that you are not in control of the situation, and prayer allows a person to accept his dilemma with hope rather than despair.

Hambleton's lessons are mutually reinforcing, consistent with good military discipline, and proven on the battlefield. In his words: "They all go together, every one of them. Maybe I'm wrong, and I don't think I am because I'm sitting here alive and talking about it, but with the four "P's" and the people you've got backing you up, you can't lose."⁷

THE TACTICAL LEVEL LESSONS

The underlying importance of Hambleton's lessons is that they refer to evasion more than rescue. His experience was at a turning point for combat search and rescue in Vietnam; it illustrated that the tried and tested means for extracting airmen were being overcome by the threat of enemy defenses.

The first, simplest, and most disturbing lesson for aircrews is that they will not always be rescued. One way to approach a task too difficult is to not do it at all. The loss of life in the Bat 21 case was too high a price to be paid on a consistent basis, and serious consideration had to be given to reemphasizing the need for effective evasion planning and training. The lesson was not to attempt a conventional rescue when it is predestined to fail;⁸ commanders have to make the tough decision to not commit rescue forces. Special operations, diversionary tactics and imaginative plans have to be considered. Above all, the rescue must be tailored to the situation.⁹

The counter approach to not doing the job at all is to find a way to do it better. The need for better equipment was recognized, principally in identifying new aircraft for the mission; the A-7 was fielded as a successor to the A-1E.¹⁰ Speed in getting to a downed airman was always critical, and the A-7 provided for quicker and deeper penetration into enemy territory with more survivability.¹¹ Night capability for rescue helicopters was also developed,¹² and the need for better area denial munitions was identified.¹³ With better hardware, and a fuller appreciation of enemy defenses, the search and rescue mission remained viable to the end of the Vietnam war.

Ironically, Hambleton's own experience with enemy defenses yields a simple but critical lesson. There was a familiarity and complacency at work in Bat 21's final mission. Had the crew been more attuned to the developing threat, it may not have treated the flight as a milk run. In the same vein, the escalating tactics in electronic warfare and SAM/AAA deployment were not clearly recognized until the loss of the Bat 21 mission.¹⁴ The lesson of never willingly yielding a tactical advantage to the enemy was relearned on this mission; the wing had enough intelligence to put a true threat picture together and avoid this loss.

THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL LESSONS

Accurate threat assessment is a primary need illustrated by this case. The Bat 21 crew did not sufficiently comprehend the threat,¹⁵ and neither did the rescue force.¹⁶ But it is not up to individual air crews to assess the threat; that is a function of the headquarters issuing their orders. It appears that the USAF command structure did not comprehend the serious nature of the 1972 Spring invasion early enough. In fact, there is substantial evidence that the U.S. command structure overall failed to grasp

the situation.¹⁷ The U.S. forces involved were in a reactive mode from the start, without the benefit of a clear picture of the threat they faced.

Even when the situation had developed and the threat was readily apparent, command coordination did not function properly. The no-fire zone confusion and conflict is the most glaring example of this problem; the unilaterally imposed no-fire order from the Air Force showed a lack of coordination under combat conditions.¹⁸ The unilateral diversion of air power to the rescue effort confirmed it, and brought the entire doctrine of search and rescue as it was being practiced into question.¹⁹ Even within the search and rescue control structure, there were indications that poor coordination caused great difficulties, "...which may have been directly responsible for the unnecessary loss of life."²⁰

It should be axiomatic that the troops laying their lives on the line can count on their own command and control structure, but the Bat 21 episode would tend prove otherwise. There were breaches in effective coordination at the combined, joint, and intra-service levels, and it is not clear at all that any lessons were learned from the experience. Assessing the threat carefully and actively coordinating the execution of the combat search and rescue missions appear to be two lessons that could have been learned.

Hambleton's version of the lessons learned are straightforward. Less clear is the view at the tactical level, although the development of new equipment and different procedures indicates considerable lesson learning. At the operational level, the water is very muddy. Perhaps because the Bat 21 rescue was clearly a tactical operation, the lesson learning process did not reach the operational level. Nevertheless, several key and questionable decisions were made at that level that merit scrutiny and debate.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER VI

1. Interview, pp. 80, 87.
2. Ibid., pp. 84, 87.
3. This idea developed from a discussion with Hambleton before the interview taping. The concept that this writer took away from the conversation was that a truly useful set of principles need to be mutually supporting, as Hambleton alludes to in the interview.
4. Interview, p. 87.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 88.
8. Muirhead, p. 7.
9. Harris, p. 4.
10. Tilford, pp. 125-126.
11. Carl Berger, et al, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1961-1975*, p. 242. The optimum chance of surviving in hostile territory was achieved if the survivor was reached in 15 minutes. After 30 minutes, the chances of rescue dropped off sharply. (See also Muirhead, pp. 7-8.)
12. Ibid.
13. Harris, p. 3.
14. Interview, p. 65.
15. Ibid., p. 68.
16. Muirhead, p. 7.
17. Turley, pp. 139-143, 189-191.
18. Francis and Nelson, p. 39.
19. Tilford, pp. 119-120.
20. Harris, p. 4.

CHAPTER VII

CASE STUDY CONCLUSIONS

The Bat 21 case, when reconstructed from contemporary source documents, is an excellent study in the conduct of combat search and rescue operations. This concluding chapter will review the current concepts for such missions, highlight some of the key material from the case study, and discuss some of the future professional implications of this material.

CURRENT CONCEPTS OF OPERATION

Exactly 18 years after Hambleton's experience, it is instructive to review current regulations for rescue operations and make some broad judgements whether lessons from the past have been incorporated into today's concepts. The latest draft Air Rescue Service concept of operations puts a philosophy substantially unchanged from the Vietnam era right up front:

USAF Combat Rescue philosophy dictates maintaining a capability to recover combat aircrews. This philosophy assumes that rescue forces may be placed at risk to recover these downed crew members. Benefits of this rescue capability include, but are not limited to, denying the enemy a potential source of intelligence and propaganda, recovering a valuable combat resource, [pilots] and increasing aircrew morale with a resultant increase in motivation and performance.¹

All of the relevant factors operating in Hambleton's case appear to have been addressed in this statement.

This concept has a specific method of grading threats based on modern AAA/SAM weapon systems. It also links the intelligence factor into assessing the threat, and provides a clear emphasis on tailoring the mission to the threat environment²--a key point missing in the Bat 21 case, where the rescue forces flew with a single concept of operations and no clear idea of the intensity of the threat.³ On face value, it appears the latest concept

of operations has institutionalized the flexibility in operations that was called for in end-of-tour reports back in 1972.^{4,5}

The current joint regulation is less philosophical, and concentrates on spelling out standardized procedures. Like many joint regulations, it is vague and broad in concepts, as if to please everyone or offend no one. It does stipulate the use of personal authentication material in a manner very similar to that used in Hambleton's case. Another point worth noting is that it refers to potential rescues by unconventional warfare forces in contested areas, which of course is the essence of the Bat 21 saga. Beyond these few points, it is not particularly useful for this study.⁶

The draft multi-service procedures manual is a much more ambitious document. It provides, in exceptional detail, a concept of operations, communications, procedures, individual survivor/evader instructions, and responsibilities for all services. In addition, detailed appendices on equipment and service capabilities are included.⁷ The threat assessment follows the general line of the Air Rescue Pamphlet, but is less specific in dealing with the nature of the threat or the impact of threat in planning missions. Under "Air Force operations," single-ship, night, low-level missions using terrain masking tactics are stressed--a significant departure conceptually from the task force concept used in Hambleton's case and still prominent in USAF documents.⁸ There is also emphasis on detailed mission planning, in sharp contrast to the Vietnam era concept of quick reaction.⁹

As a general observation, these current documents have captured the lessons of the case study at the individual and tactical levels. The joint manual suggests, without really proving, that some lessons have been institutionalized at the operational level as well. As with any regulation or pamphlet, the proof is in the practice, not in the staff writers' pens.

KEY CASE STUDY POINTS

In the absence of significant conflict since the Vietnam War, there has not been much proof of concept testing going on in the search and rescue business. Hence the value of a case study--but which points from the Bat 21 are of particular interest vis-a-vis current concepts?

Certainly Hambleton's message of personal preparedness is still valid. His experiences in transition from peacetime to wartime, and milk run to shoot down, are still useful examples to the professional. His contention that you can count on your fellow military professional when the chips are down also needs to be marked rather closely.¹⁰ Its doubtful that any intensive modern battlefield will allow a FAC to operate in hostile territory the way Hambleton's guardians did, but there is still the commitment that downed crewman will not be abandoned.

Another useful thought from the Bat 21 case is the potential success of evasion when conventional rescue is not possible. This is clearly recognized in current concepts and it is probable that evasions will be more prevalent than air rescues on the next modern battlefield. In Vietnam, the successful evasion was an extraordinary case, but it does not track that future conflicts will follow this pattern. Any neutral or friendly indigenous population has the makings of a successful evasion environment, and evasion is a skill our military should not neglect. That was pointed out in an end-of-tour report back in 1972!¹¹

A strong suit of the Bat 21 case is ingenuity. As one search and rescue commander put it: "There is no limitation on resources, tactics or concepts to be employed to effect a rescue."¹² As the Spring 1972 invasion illustrated, intense warfighting can render conventional rescue techniques obsolete. It will take an airframe with good passive self defense, night

and low profile flying capabilities, and a crew with imaginative tactics to get into hostile territory and pull out a pilot. The high tech, single ship dash described in the draft multi-service procedures manual may forever replace the large scale conventional search and rescue task force.

THE FUTURE PROFESSIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Tactics may change as has been suggested, but without the hardware capabilities to back up the concepts, new tactical ideas are moot. The Air Rescue Service was only recently reestablished following its departure from the Special Operations Command (SOC). That is a positive move in the sense that mission will now be with a separate agency, freer to develop the new tactics that will be necessary. The down side is that the aircraft most capable of executing new tactics did not make the move out of SOC. It is not the purpose of this paper to address current capabilities, but the efficacy of the combat search and rescue mission with the present air rescue assets against any significant air defense threat is very much in question. Is it even a breach of professional ethics to espouse a concept of rescuing downed aircrew if a reasonable capacity to get the job done does not exist?

Current capabilities will make some saves, some times, but modern air defenses may have forever forbidden the 800 sortie missions like Bat 21,¹³ or the all out task force operations like Locher's rescue from the "suburbs" of Hanoi.¹⁴ Even in a low intensity conflict, shoulder fired SAMs can deny the airspace over a downed flyer to rescue aircraft. It is also unlikely that an air component commander will ever again have the unilateral authority to establish large no-fire zones at an operational level, or to divert significant numbers of sorties from the battlefield for a combat search and rescue effort. The downed flyer in the next war may have to look

more inward toward the model of Captain Lance Sijan, the Congressional Medal of Honor winner who struggled through six weeks of evasion, and another month of captivity.¹⁵ The Air Rescue Service may be willing to put themselves at risk to save others, but the Bat 21 case showed that valor is not proof against air defense, nor a substitute for aircraft capability.

There is still no rule to tell the commander when to quit on a combat search and rescue mission. He remains pledged to rescue his aircrews but is without guidelines to determine at what cost. Traditionally, "...rescuemen have tried never to stop short of giving each rescue attempt every possible effort."¹⁶ It is the commander who will have to hold them back if the risks are too great, the pay-off too small, or the capabilities too meager. It remains difficult to establish the relationship between the costs of a search and rescue operation and its potential for success, but it must be done.¹⁷ The Vietnam ledger was 3,883 lives saved at a cost of 71 rescuemen and 45 aircraft.¹⁸ Are we willing to pay an equal or higher price the next time around?

Probably, but the cost will only be reasonable if the issues are studied, the tactics honed, and the capabilities preserved and improved. Such is the value of studying the life and death decisions of the Bat 21 case and every other account of its genre; it is the only way in peacetime to prepare for the inevitable decisions that will follow in war. One Air Rescue commander stated at the end of his tour in Vietnam: "It is important that the lessons learned concerning rescue are not lost after this war is over. Too many good and brave men have sacrificed too much to ever require a relearning of rescue procedures... ." ¹⁹ As Gene Hambleton says at the beginning of his search and rescue, escape and evasion talks: "Take notes, you might have an exam next week."²⁰

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER VII

1. Department of the Air Force, Air Rescue Service Pamphlet 2-1, p. 2.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-6.
3. Muirhead, p. 7.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Harris, p. 3.
6. Department of the Air Force, Air Force Regulation 64-3, pp. 1-8.
7. Department of the Air Force, Tactical Air Command Pamphlet 50-51, pp. 9-11.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. J-1 - J-7, 8-3 - 8-4.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-3 - 8-5.
10. Interview, pp. 81, 86.
11. Harris, p. 4.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
13. Muirhead, p. 7.
14. Francis and Nelson, pp. 40-41.
15. Maj Donald K. Schneider, Air Force Heroes in Vietnam, pp. 59-61.
16. Tilford, p. 119.
17. Mrozek, p. 118.
18. Berger, et al., p. 243.
19. Muirhead, p. 8.
20. Interview, p. 86.

APPENDIX 1

GLOSSARY

- AAA: Anti-Aircraft Artillery.
- ARC LIGHT: B-52 formation bombing mission.
- ARVN: Army of the Republic of Vietnam. Also, South Vietnamese soldiers or units.
- A-1E: A Korean War vintage prop driven ground attack aircraft.
- A-7: A jet ground attack aircraft.
- Bat 21: Call-sign of LtCol Hambleton's aircraft. Used also to refer to Hambleton himself, or his story. Also a book and a film.
- COMMANDO HUNT: A series of interdiction bombing campaigns.
- Contrail: Literally, condensation trail. Linear cloud left by temperature differential from engine exhaust in cold high altitude air.
- DMZ: Demilitarized Zone. Used interchangeably to mean the North/South Vietnamese border.
- EB-66: Originally a nuclear capable bomber; converted for electronic counter measure missions in Vietnam.
- ECW: Electronic Counter Warfare; electronically defeating or disabling enemy weapon systems.
- FAC: Forward Air Controller; spotter plane that coordinates tactical air missions.
- "G": One gravitational force. Expressed in multiples such as 3 G's.
- HH-53: Rescue helicopter; see "Jolly Green" entry.
- Ho Chi Mihn Trail: Infiltration routes leading from North Vietnam, through Laos, and into South Vietnam.
- Jolly Green: From Jolly Green Giant; nickname and call-sign for rescue helicopters.
- Life Support Section: The personnel who maintain survival equipment, helmets, masks, ejection seats, and other crew equipment.
- LORAN: Long Range Aid to Navigation; a position fixing transceiver.
- Milk Run: A simple, low threat mission.

Military Region 1: South Vietnamese military region abutting the DMZ.
The area of operations for the ARVN I Corps.

NVA: North Vietnamese Army.

O-2: Push-Pull engine FAC aircraft. Obsolete in 1972.

OV-10: Twin engine, two place FAC aircraft.

PACAF: Pacific Air Command. Southeast Asia was in this geographic command.

Pave Nail: A location finder used on OV-10s operating on LORAN principle.

POW: Prisoner of War.

Quang Tri: Northern most province in South Vietnam; within Military Region 1. Provincial capital of the same name.

Route Package: A targeting scheme dividing North Vietnam into six areas.

SAC: Strategic Air Command. The USAF major command with bombers and the nuclear deterrent.

SAM: Surface to Air Missile.

SAM Break: A violent turn and dive combination designed to throw a SAM off the track of an aircraft.

Sandy: Call-sign and nickname for attack aircraft assigned to support rescue missions. Usually A-1Es; later in the war, A-7s.

SEA: Southeast Asia. The USAF area of operations in Indochina, inclusive of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, as well as South and North Vietnam. In general use in the USAF vice Vietnam, as over half of USAF combat missions originated outside South Vietnam.

SEAL: Literally, Sea-Air-Land. U.S. Navy special operations forces.

SOC: Special Operations Command.

TAC: Tactical Air Command; Used generally to refer to fighter operations.

UH-1H: A Huey helicopter in standard use with the U.S. Army in Vietnam for troop transport, gunships, medevac, etc.

VNAF: Vietnamese Air Force. South Vietnamese air service.

APPENDIX 2

THE POPULAR ACCOUNTS

A decision was made in structuring this case study that the existing popular accounts of Gene Hambleton's story would not stand alone as source material for the effort. Indeed, the ultimate direction of the study was to avoid the popular accounts whenever possible in deference to other primary or secondary sources. This does not infer that the book and the film are unworthy accounts of the incident, but it does suppose that both versions of the story have strengths and weaknesses not suited to a military case study. As background to this case study, and as a guide to military professionals who wish to study the book or screen the film, this appendix provides a more complete treatment not possible within the case study text.

The order of presentation is to review first the book, and then the film, in terms of accuracy, authenticity, and thematic content. Accuracy is here defined as faithfulness to the facts of this specific incident, both in correctness and chronology. Authenticity in this context is the trustworthiness of the details, and is a judgement as to whether or not the account represents the people, period and place with bona fide realism. The thematic review is a broad attempt to capture the author or director's intentions and decide if the book and film made their intended points.

Because of the relative complexity of the film vis-a-vis the book, proportionally more effort was necessary in reviewing and detailing the film, and this is reflected both the length and depth of that segment. Also included in the film section are some unique insights from Hambleton on the experience of being a professional military advisor to the film, and a sketch of the main characters in the movie.

BAT 21: THE BOOK¹

Bat 21 is a short, fast paced adventure story based Hambleton's eleven and one half days in the Vietnamese jungle. You can read it in a few hours and come away with a clear picture of what Hambleton went through, but you cannot study it as a piece of military history unless you are willing to do a certain amount of outside research.

Accuracy

William C. Anderson's affinity for the subject of his book is not difficult to discern. Described as a friend and former neighbor of Hambleton, he is also a retired USAF Colonel.² Hambleton had written an account of his own story before meeting Anderson, but he could not sell it. Anderson was an established writer with the technical skill and publishing contacts to make the project fly.³ In tackling the narrative, Anderson chose to simplify the story by using a literary device: he substituted one fictional character (Captain Dennis Clark) for the score of actual FAC pilots who flew cover for the downed Hambleton. From that departure point, the book became "based on the true story of...," and a considerable degree of factual accuracy was lost, particularly in reconstructing the scenes and dialogue associated with Hambleton's would-be rescuers.⁴

To Anderson's credit, this entire process is explained in detail in an Afterword to the book, in which he goes to the extent of crediting several actual key players by name.⁵ For case study purposes, however, there is a gap in accuracy that has to be recognized: the professional reader is advised to read the Afterword thoroughly to gain an understanding of how Anderson has dealt with the facts. That is not to suggest the book is inaccurate overall, as Anderson used both primary source documents from the

USAF and Hambleton's own personal account.⁶ In Hambleton's judgement, the events in the book from his perspective on the ground, are a nearly perfect chronological account of his adventures and misadventures.⁷

Authenticity

Because of Hambleton's involvement, the use of primary USAF source documents, and perhaps Anderson's own USAF experience, the book achieves exceptional authenticity. Details of flying operations, survival equipment, and radio procedures all ring true. This authenticity has considerable merit, because it allows Anderson--who was writing under the self-imposed inaccuracies previously detailed--to carry through with a simplified and believable narrative. A degree of realism is maintained that sustains the reader's professional interest, even in light of the liberties taken with the accuracy of the account. In Anderson's own words: "...at no point have I knowingly violated the overall sequence and structure of the facts in this case, departed from the daily realities of Air Force operations at this period in the conflict, or resorted to any anachronisms or technical impossibilities."⁸

Thematic Content

At the same time, it is apparent that this book was not written with a solely professional readership in mind. This is not a historical account with academic rigor, but a more popular account--a "best-seller." It is a story of total professional trust between people who have never met and the personal will to survive against seemingly insurmountable odds. Whether or not the book succeeds in putting these themes across becomes a matter of literary perspective.

The Library of Congress catalogs this book as a biography in four out

of five references,⁹ presumably because of its personal focus on Hambleton. This creates expectations that may not be met, as reflected in the following book review from *Library Journal*:

While he [Anderson] succeeds in telling a rousing tale...one questions whether this ought to be considered more fiction than journalism. Its "gee whiz" style, *True Men Action Tales* tone, and moralizing will disturb the most casual historian of military action of this period.¹⁰

A reader taking the different perspective that this is a tale of escape and evasion based on actual events, will not likely be disappointed. Consider this review from the more market and sales oriented *Publishers Weekly*:

...one of the most exciting books of its genre...this tense, day-by-day story of Hambleton's survival and of the life-and-death duel of wits between the contending forces to sieze (or rescue) him will keep readers turning the pages until they reach the satisfying conclusion and climax.¹¹

This book's literary merit depends very much on the reader's expectation, but the theme of survival through dependence on one's professional peers and personal will is clearly presented.

The professional reader is cautioned to read Anderson's notes in the book's Afterword before accepting this account as accurate in the academic sense. Anderson has consciously chosen to alter the facts in *Bat 21* for literary considerations, but he has balanced the effect of that decision with a correct chronology of events and a careful attention to authenticity.

BAT 21: THE FILM¹²

Peter Markle's film is perhaps even more effective than the book in driving home the theme of the interdependence of people in combat, or as the tag line for the film's advertising reads, "War isn't always about enemies."¹³ The film makes that point well, but arguably at the expense of both accuracy and authenticity. As co-author of the screenplay, Anderson

brought to the script all of the strengths and weaknesses of the book. Because the film is based on the book, and the book is based on the real story, you know that you are going to get a third generation version of the facts at best.

Accuracy

The setting of the film is 1968 for a start, and the Spring 1972 invasion over the DMZ toward Quang Tri becomes what--the 1968 Tet offensive? The point is, accuracy is violated early in the film, although not abandoned completely until the closing scenes. A military purist will cringe at the sight of a combined forward air control and rescue unit being run off a dirt strip by a colonel who flies a UH-1,¹⁴ particularly if they are expecting a view of the huge airfield complex of Da Nang, where such operations were actually flown. That patently false setting is surrounded by completely accurate vignettes, such as getting shot down by a SAM south of the DMZ, Hambleton calling the FAC while still airborne in his parachute, and the FAC laying it on the line to Hambleton about who is in charge of the rescue.¹⁵

Perhaps the most accurate scenes are those involving Hambleton's solo actions and his interaction with the FAC over the radio. Hiding while an patrol walks within feet of him (twice), calling in air strikes on enemy troops, and anticipating a first light pick-up that does not come, are all scenes faithful to Hambleton's actual ordeal.¹⁶ When he calls on the FAC for support and encouragement, it is Gene Hackman the actor playing to Danny Glover the actor, but with an uncanny accuracy to Hambleton's own version of the experience.¹⁷ The remarkable evasion plan of playing a golf match is faithfully explained in the film, with the exception of Hambleton being credited for thinking up the idea (his golfing buddies did that).¹⁸

About two-thirds through the movie, this on-again-off-again level of

accuracy begins to deteriorate. Beyond the fact that a rescue chopper was shot down over a village by ground fire, there is nothing to factually support the ten minute scene that ensues: it starts with a mixed three ship search and rescue task force (laughable in view of the huge scope of the actual effort) and ends with the cavalier disobedience of orders by the rescue chopper crew, resulting in their capture and execution (not a laughing matter in light of the death of six men in a completely legitimate effort to rescue Hambleton).¹⁹ At the brink of abandoning accuracy, the director introduces two stray, but absolutely accurate points: yes, the village was blown up in retribution; and yes, Hambleton did feel like quitting when the rescue chopper was shot down.²⁰

From then on in it is down hill for the military historian. The antics of the FAC stealing the boss' helicopter, finding Hambleton, and dashing to a river rescue rendezvous in the midst of a B-52 carpet bombing attack, are 100% Hollywood. There is some interesting stunt flying, and a symbolic joining of the plot's co-protagonists, but nothing remotely factual.²¹ This wrap-up after three days on the ground instead of eleven and a half is clearly a cinematic device to close the film. The film does close with two exceptionally appropriate subtitles, both accurate: "LtCol Hambleton is now retired and resides in Arizona, near a golf course," and "This story is based on actual events. However some of the characters and incidents portrayed and the names herein are fictitious, and any similarity... ." ²²

Authenticity

The use of authenticity as a saving grace does not work for the film the way it does for the book. Although there are flashes of authenticity in the movie, there is an equal weight of scenes that lack authenticity. Perhaps the crowning achievement of realism in the film is the location

filming in Sabah, Borneo, East Malaysia. The visual effects are nearly perfect and the terrain, forestation and river scenery are excellent. The production crew would like to think that this realism extended to the "air base" they created,²³ but that point has been disputed earlier.

Not in dispute are some excellent flying scenes. Although the helicopter stunt flying gets gratuitous in the latter scenes, the FAC flying was excellent throughout. Never mind that the O-2, which should have been an OV-10, is really a fixed up Cessna Skymaster 337;²⁴ stunt pilot Lyle Byrum provides an authentic flying profile such as described by an actual FAC pilot: "...a mission in the DMZ area meant 'four hours of dodging SAMs and AAA continuously, with not more than five minutes that you weren't swinging to avoid something'."²⁵ At several points in the film, attack aircraft from the Malaysian Air Force roll in on target to add a level of authenticity, although the those deficient in their aircraft recognition drills may wonder what they really saw (F-5s?).²⁶

If it is the little details that establish authenticity, then this film has some room for improvement. A number of fine points might lead the careful observer to conclude that authenticity was not a top priority on the set of *Bat 21*. The mix of actual and concocted call signs is carried over from the book, as is the identification of all the FAC aircraft as O-2s. The keen viewer could ask why Hackman carries an automatic pistol (and uses it), while Hambleton had a .38 caliber revolver (and didn't use it). Did USAF officers really wear large rank insignia and ribbons on their 1505 shade khakis? When the dead helicopter pilot's duffle bag is shown, it reads "WO1 Ross Carver." Warrant officer pilots in the Air Force during the Vietnam conflict?--no, that was the Army. Finally, is "Quang Tri" or "Korat" really pronounced that way?²⁷

Detailed authenticity is particularly difficult in a visual medium and *Bat 21* achieves mixed results in its efforts at realism. Its authenticity is not perfect and the professional viewer may find that distracting, but it is not deficient to the point of discrediting the message of the film.

Thematic Content

Here is the theme of the film, *BAT 21*, in the words of the film makers themselves: "*BAT 21...takes a unique, humanistic look at the Vietnam War. It is more the story of an ordinary man in extraordinary circumstances than a war story. It...is more about friendship than combat, and more about survival than winning.*"²⁸ Using that measure of merit, and setting aside the military professional's desire for accuracy and authenticity, there is little doubt that this film makes its point.

Gene Hambleton's story is very much that of a normal man in abnormal circumstances and the best elements of the film's humane message are the true parts. He was a 53 year old dropped into a ground combat situation for the first time in his life. His friends did have the ingenuity to dream up an evasion course based on golf holes, and he did have the tenacity to pull it off. This human interest angle is where the film is at its strongest for the professional viewer. He is on record as saying the movie is accurate in the way he lived through the experience on the ground, particularly the rendering of the emotional support he received.²⁹

Hambleton is totally sold on the fraternal support the Air Force provides to its own.³⁰ That important theme becomes embodied in the movie in the nearly symbiotic relationship that develops between Hambleton and the FAC.³¹ To the extent that the film stresses this camaraderie of two officers who have never met face-to-face, it carries Hambleton's message to the public. In his own words: "Don't quit, as long as there's somebody

there, let them help... ."32 The radio conversation scenes between Hackman and Glover are a credit to good acting but they also illustrate this point and demonstrate the power the film achieves when it is faithful to Hambleton's actual story. When the actors are communicating with each other the way Hambleton and the FACs did in Vietnam, the story truly does become one of comradeship rather than combat.

It is not combat mainly because one man does not fight thousands. He hides, he runs, and maybe with that help from his friends, he escapes. This truly is a survival, or escape and evasion film. That is exactly what Hambleton set out for it to be when Anderson first wrote the screen play, and it comes across well in the movie.³³ While the inaccuracies ebb and flow through the script, the message Hambleton set out in his own "four P's" does consistently come through: don't panic, come up with a plan, have the patience to see it through, and pray for the strength to carry it off.³⁴ To describe that as a formula to survive rather than win seems very reasonable.

Advising the Film Maker

On balance, Bat 21 comes through the test of meeting its own thematic goals exceptionally well. The unfortunate fact is that with more accuracy in the plot, and more authenticity in its detail, this could have been a great film for military study. Hambleton himself was an advisor to the film and regrets that the movie makers did not take more of his advice--he is convinced it would have been a better film if the military viewpoint had been more in evidence.³⁵ As it was, his role was finished when the film entered shooting and he did not make the trip to Borneo.³⁶

Film production is a strange business to the average military officer and Hambleton's experience illustrates that. When he and Anderson were closing the deal on film rights to the book, the head of a production

company sprang this on them, while waving a sizeable check in his hand: "If you don't make this man black [the FAC], I won't even talk to you."³⁷ That is hardball in the ticket selling business! Actually, Hambleton did not have a problem with this as the large number of FACs flying cover for him likely did include some blacks and after all, a literary device like the composite FAC looks like whatever you want it to be.

Later, as the film advisor, Hambleton noted that the mild profanity of the book had become full blown obscenity in the film. There is a particular segment of the film when the rescue helicopter is shot down that erupts into about eight minutes of hard-core cursing.³⁸ Realistic? Well, there was certainly some cursing when the actual shootdown occurred,³⁹ but Hambleton felt it was seriously overused at this point in the film, and said so to the producer. The gist of the reply was, "Hey, look, we've got to make an "R" rated movie or people won't go to see it...I put up ten million dollars and I'm going to do it anyway I damn well please."⁴⁰ Welcome to Hollywood!

The bottom line in high budget film making is turning a profit and it is understandable, if unfortunate, that accuracy and authenticity will be employed only to the extent that they do not interfere with proven ticket selling formulae. The director will use them to the extent that it meets his aesthetic requirements and the producer, to the extent that they support healthy box office receipts. That generalization must have exceptions, but you can also argue that Hambleton's account came out well in this film compared to what Hollywood is capable of. Many recent Vietnam war films are sell-outs to an anti-war theme,⁴¹ or one dimensional cartoon representations of the military professional.⁴² Because Bat 21 has a humane theme in an inhumane setting, and a mix of actual and fictional characters, it is a particularly good example of how the characterization in a film can tilt the

balance between a professionally useful film and just another movie.

Characterization

Bat 21 avoids selling out by more or less sticking to Hambleton's actual experiences and by achieving reasonable characterizations of the military professional. The characters of Hambleton, the FAC, and even the colonel in charge (Jerry Reed, as Col George Walker), are all nicely developed in the film. They are all clearly professionals who happen to be capable of heroism, but are also well grounded in their dedication to the mission. They avoid the caricature heroism of a John Wayne in *Green Berets*, or the totally cartoonish antics of a Sylvester Stallone in *Rambo II*.⁴³ In fact, Hackman's most recent Vietnam film prior to *Bat 21* was the fictional but heroic *Uncommon Valor*, which also had at least some semblance of authenticity and thematic integrity.⁴⁴ In this film, Hackman captures a character that is very like the real Gene Hambleton, and conducts himself in a manner befitting an officer with severe doubts about the situation he is in, but with faith in himself and his fellow officers.

The closest Peter Markle pushes his characters to cartoonism is in the supporting roles. Helicopter pilot Ross Carver (David Marshall Grant) has a big mouth and is reckless to the point of unprofessionalism in the air. Crew chief Sgt. Harley Rumbaugh (Clayton Rohner) is also overplayed as a hippie type grease-monkey who cannabilizes other crews' aircraft and gives impromptu helicopter flying lessons. They are at least entertaining, and do little to erode the strong development of the leading roles.

When taken as a whole, the characters in *Bat 21* tend to support the theme and enhance the authenticity of the movie, although not necessarily the accuracy. There are no fatally flawed maniacs running around, nor are there any heros of superhuman mental and physical strength. There is a

believable mix of personalities who act out the basic range of human behavior in combat, from self-centered survival to self-sacrificing heroism.

SUMMARY

In the final analysis, Bat 21 is a film worth watching for the military professional. Like its literary predecessor, it has built an artificial shell around Hambleton's actual experiences to simplify complex events and to streamline the action. Also like the book, the film is at its best when the events on the ground are faithful to Gene Hambleton's personal account. The weight of inaccuracy in both accounts makes it inadvisable to use either as a sole source in a case study, and the lack of authenticity in the film is particularly distracting. Nevertheless, both share the core of an exceptional story that merits the professional attention of military officers who have an interest in escape and evasion, conduct under combat pressure, and comradeship on the battlefield.

ENDNOTES: APPENDIX 2

1. William C. Anderson. *Bat 21*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1980. (also published in paperback by Bantam in 1983)
2. Anderson, liner notes to the book.
3. *Interview*, p. 88.
4. Anderson, pp. 185-186.
5. *Ibid.*, 187.
6. *Ibid.*, liner notes.
7. *Interview*, p. 88.
8. Anderson, pp. 186.
9. Anderson, copyright notes.
10. Mel D. Lane, "Bat 21," *Library Journal*, 15 October 1980, pp. 2194-2195.
11. "Bat 21," *Publishers Weekly*, 19 September 1980, pp. 148-149.
12. Peter Markle, Director, *Bat 21*, film, Tri-Star Pictures, 1988. The Media Home Entertainment videocassette release is used in this paper. (hereafter referred to as *Film*, with numerals indicating the time when the referenced scene first appears, in minutes and seconds. In some instances, a companion reference to the interview in Appendix 3 is made.)
13. "Bat 21 Production Notes," p. 11.
14. *Film*, 21:50.
15. *Film*, 11:52, 14:36, 16:29; *Interview*, pp. 68, 72, 75-76.
16. *Film*, 27:18, 61:19, 39:54, 45:28; *Interview*, pp. 79, 76.
17. *Film*, 34:14; *Interview*, pp. 75-76.
18. *Film*, 46:12; *Interview*, p. 77.
19. *Film*, from 68:40; *Interview*, p. 76.
20. *Film*, 81:04, 85:17; *Interview*, p. 76.
21. *Film*, from 91:27.
22. *Ibid.*, 104:00, 105:50.
23. "Bat 21 Production Notes," p. 13-15.

24. "Bat 21 Production Notes," p. 14.

25. Lavalley, pp. 34-35. (see also "Production Notes." at p. 15)

26. Film, 41:35, 85:03.

27. The purpose of listing these scenes is to establish the trend of annoying lapses in detail throughout the film. In an interesting contrast, the production notes claim: "The quest for authenticity was relentless." (p.14) This at least establishes the wide separation in points of departure on the search for authenticity between this writer and the film's producer. But the real give-away is the "Officers Club," which is far below Air Force standards! The scenes referenced can be found in the Film, in the order presented in the text, at 41:35, 50:55, 08:25, 90:30, 08:50 and 46:12.

28. "Superstars Gene Hackman and Danny Glover Reveal the Human Side of War in 'Bat 21'," Press Release, p. 1.

29. Lou Cedrone, "Subject of 'Bat 21' Says Film on Target," Express-News (San Antonio), 31 October 1988, p. 4-D.

30. Interview, p. 86.

31. Judy Stone, " 'Bat 21' a Gripping War Tale," San Francisco Chronicle, 21 October 1988, p. E1.

32. Interview, p. 90.

33. Ibid., p. 89-90.

34. Ibid., p. 80.

35. Ibid., p. 90.

36. Cedrone, p. 4D.

37. Interview, p. 89.

38. Film, 73:00.

39. This writer has heard audio tapes of the actual Jolly 62 shoot-down in progress. Although the radio transmissions are emotionally charged, and there is some shouting, the only profanity is the FAC referring to the failed operational as a "clusterfuck," which unfortunately it was.

40. Interview, p. 89.

41. Col Harry G. Summers, "Stone and Kovic Sell Out Their Vietnam Comrades...," Air Force Times, 5 February 1990, p. 23.

42. Martha Bayles, "The Road to Rambo III," The New Republic, 18 & 25 July 1988, p. 30.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

APPENDIX 3

AN INTERVIEW WITH GENE HAMBLETON

As explained in the text, the key perspective on this case comes from the principal participant, Lieutenant Colonel Iceal E. "Gene" Hambleton, USAF (Ret). To capture his thoughts on essential points in the episode, an interview was conducted on 17-18 November 1989, at his home in Tucson, Arizona. Informal discussions were held on 17 November to clarify the scope and thrust of the interview, and to validate previously prepared questions. A formal interview was then taped on 18 November, to provide the basis for this appendix. Appropriate to the occasion of doing business with Colonel Hambleton, the interviews were bracketed by two rounds of golf.

Using oral history techniques, nearly 100 questions were posed to fill in or support research from primary and secondary source material. A full two hours of audio tape has been preserved in unedited form, as well as a verbatim transcript of the complete session. This appendix represents approximately one half of the original transcript, which was edited to achieve brevity, and to focus on the questions and replies that proved most relevant to the case study. It is annotated where necessary on points of clarity or accuracy, but it is not otherwise altered.

The text, which follows on the next page, is labeled alternately as:

SLB: Stanley L. Busboom, LtCol, USAF, interviewer.

IEH: Iceal E. Hambleton, LtCol, USAF (Ret), interviewee.

As is customary in transcripts, significant verbal pauses are indicated by ellipsis. Editorial comments, insertions, and clarifications are enclosed in brackets. The interviewer gratefully acknowledges the participation of Colonel Hambleton in the interview and sincerely appreciates the hospitality in his home during the interview sessions.

SLB: I'd like to start in with a discussion on preparedness for what happened--understanding that you could never be prepared for what really did happen. You mentioned while we were talking before that everybody in the squadron knew that somebody always had the chance of not coming back.

IEH: Yes, it's very true. I had been in three conflicts, and flew combat both in Korea and in the Vietnamese war. When you're going over to a place where you know people are going to be shooting at you, you know cotton-picking well that it's going to be dangerous. But with our mission, we were support aircraft. You've heard it--the Air Force has heard it, the Army has heard it, [and] the Navy's heard it--familiarity breeds contempt. In our airplane we were always just thinking we're standing-off and we considered everything a milk run. I guess I've got about a hundred and twelve combat missions in B-29s and in [EB-66s]¹ and it got to a place where you think: "Nothing can happen to us."

SLB: Where the B-29 missions any "hairier"--in their day?

IEH: Yes they were, because in those missions we had the MIGs, and the ground fire. Now we didn't have surface to air missiles then, but the guns they were using could get up to [where] we generally flew at about 26 or 27 thousand feet. But our big problem was MIGs, [while] in Vietnam [they] weren't too much of a problem. First of all, they didn't have too many and we were flying far enough South that they kind of forgot we were there. But we were sitting there thinking, "well, we have flown this many missions--nothing can happen to us, it always happens to the other guy." Then suddenly, where am I? Hanging in a parachute--I'm the other guy. But yes, anytime you get into a hostile area, you'd better believe, your chances of getting shot down are pretty good.

SLB: Am I correct in reading your personal history that you had just come

back into the cockpit after ten years in missiles?

IEH: Yes, that's true. Let's see, I was a squadron commander here in the 390th,² and I believe it was March that I got the message that I was going to Southeast Asia, after ten years in missiles. I went to Shaw AFB to make [and] check out in the B-66 for about six months, and I finally ended up in Southeast Asia in August of '71. Going to Shaw was little bit different from what I had been used to. I'd been in SAC for 25 years and they suddenly assign me to TAC. Well, believe it or not, SAC and TAC operate a little bit differently!³ [laughter]

IEH: They had to check us out with the people that they knew we were going to fly with over there in Vietnam. It was just getting to meet the people and getting your skills back up to a proficiency level where you're not going to take off for Vietnam and end up in Guam.

SLB: If I could go on to a topic I think we need to cover: professional preparedness and specifically, survival training. Did you have survival training during this period at Shaw, or in between?

IEH: Yes, I did. I started out even before I got to Shaw [with] the water survival school at Turkey Run, Florida. I completed my training at Shaw AFB, and on my way the Vietnam--not Vietnam, Southeast Asia, because really the only time I was in Vietnam was the 11 1/2 days I was on the ground--they sent us to Clark Air Force Base in the Phillipines. We called it snake school...actually it was a jungle survival school that took about ten days.⁴

SLB: The jungle survival, did that include escape and evasion, as well as survival school?

IEH: Yes, it was geared towards Vietnam. The guys there knew where we were going and they geared all their training to the area and country where, if something happened, we would go down.

SLB: How about in-country training when you got to the Wing?

IEH: Very little, I had one indoctrination flight and all they did was take over there and let us look at radar scope and show us what the country looked like. I think I had an instructor with me one mission maybe, but it just so happens that I have been a radar operator since 1945 and, egotistical me, there's not a hell of a lot they could tell me about a radar scope because I'd been through about 6 or 7 systems.

SLB: So there wasn't any formal escape and evasion or survival training in country?

IEH: No, the only training we got over there was life support. We went through ejection seat training at least once a month. We would sit up there in the training building [and] fire the seat, go out to the airplane, and look at the hatch where we were coming out. But that was about it [because] they figured we'd had enough training and there were very few youngsters in my outfit. I was the staff navigator, I had 18 navigators assigned to my section, and all but 3 of them were lieutenant colonels. By this time, if they didn't know how to fire an ejection seat, they shouldn't be there.

SLB: Did you fall under Wing scheduling or did you schedule the navigators?

IEH: I scheduled my navigators to all of the missions--right.

SLB: So, when you finally got on this mission we're going to talk about, you were scheduling yourself to go?

IEH: I assigned myself to that mission, yes. Stupid!

SLB: How about the briefing for the mission itself--was there anything peculiar about it?

IEH: Nothing peculiar at all. We got the frag order and the wing briefed us--we're going here and [this is] what we're going to do. We got our crew together, and briefed them on where we were going and why. We even told the

crew. "Okay, if a SAM comes up, we're going to break one way...or we're either going to break right or left.

SLB: You had pretty good intelligence on where the sites were?

IEH: Oh, absolutely.

SLB: The SAM-2 sights were fixed sites?

IEH: They were, until April the second.⁵ The SAM that shot us down...we had been plotting that missile site for about two or three months. Our airplane was equipped so that as soon as a site comes on the air, we picked up its signal. Well, I'd been plotting that cotton-picking thing for about two months and I kept telling people there's a missile site there--and nobody would believe me.

SLB: Because they never lauched from there?

IEH: No, they never lauched, and the signals...you'd fly one mission and there wouldn't be any there, the next two there would. And somebody else would come back and say hey, I plotted this guy right there--and that was way south of the DMZ. So, we took that for gospel...there's no missile site there. We told our guys, "Okay, we're flying Northeast, if something comes up, we re going to break right, away from the threat." Well, on April the second, we started to break right as soon as we found a SAM in the air, and our boys in the back said, "negative, negative, negative," because it was not coming towards us, it was coming from behind us. Then we had to change tactics in the air real quick--instead of breaking right, we dumped it over and went the other way, but just about the time we tipped the wing up, the thing hit us. But it came from the South, it didn't come from the North.

SLB: In this particular mission, you were running interference for an ARC LIGHT strike, B-52s, North of you.

IEH: Yes, they were bombing a build up in either the Mu Gia or Ban Karai

pass.⁶ I don't know which it was, but believe it or not, they hit the target.

SLB: I want to go over your job in detecting the SAM launches. You were flying at a low altitude and kind of trolling to bring the missiles out.

IEH: Yes, we were 7 or 8 thousand feet below the B-52s and our job was to get over there and rile them, rattle them, do whatever, so that they would fire missiles--at us!

SLB: If I recall, you and your crew had done this over 100 times?

IEH: Yes, a hundred and something, because we know the missile can't hit us. Heck, we're sitting there monitoring the thing on our scopes all the time, and we can break away from it. We would let the missile fly long enough to make sure it was locked on us, then we'd go into our SAM break and thing would follow us instead of going on at the B-52s.

SLB: Could you go over that sequence one more time, the three lights ?

IEH: I know we're talking about a lot of years ago and it's the most antiquated equipment now that you've ever seen, but back in those days it was good equipment. When these SAM sites would get ready to fire, they turned their systems. We had a little scope up in front of myself and the pilot in the cockpit, and as soon as they would turn on we would get an amber light that would say "low power." That thing would stay amber until the SAM guidance system got up to speed, and then it would go from amber--"low power," to green--"high power." As soon as the missile came off the pad, we'd get a flashing red light that said "launch, launch, launch." We're sitting there at 30 or 32 thousand feet and we're pros, like everybody else. We'd flown enough missions to know that it took that missile ten seconds to get from ground level to 30 thousand feet. So we'd sit there and count "one-thousand one, one thousand two, three, four, five...," letting

it get about half way up there and making sure it was locked on to us. Then we'd go into our SAM break, and the missile would try to follow us.

SLB: I think you told me the missile was only good for two G's... ?

IEH: Two to two and a half and we could pull four and a half, five, something like that. As it started to follow us and got over two and half G's or whatever, the guidance system would fail and it would actually tumble out through the air. We'd giggle and laugh and drop down to about 10 thousand feet, then come up and let them shoot another one at us.

SLB: Is the B-66 is a big plane? Was the SAM break well within its flight envelope?

IEH: No, it's very small plane. Fully loaded, it only weighed about 85 thousand pounds. In the air it flys just like a fighter plane. That's one of the good things the Air Force did--they picked the right plane for the right job at the right time.

SLB: While we're still in the air now...and on that particular day, they changed tactics on you.

IEH: Yes they did. What they did was, they didn't turn anything on the ground, but rather, they fired it optically. Nice clear day, you know, so they just fired at the contrails. They got apparently about half way up and then they flipped the switch and updated the guidance system. The first indication we had in our aircraft was the launch light, so what do we do? We start counting "one thousand one... ." Well, the thing's already half way there--we're five seconds late.

SLB: Did the pilot get through the SAM break?

IEH: It hit us about half way through our break, just about the time we turned the airplane over. If we'd have had two more seconds, he'd have missed us.

SLB: After that first hit, you got the ejection signal?

IEH: My aircraft commander gave me the seat pin with the red flag--go! And I went, immediately. I'm sitting there thinking, "he's going to be right behind me," but right after I came out of the airplane I heard this tremendous explosion and the airplane was just completely gone. When I got back to Korat a month or so later, they told me that a second missile had hit the plane. Hell, the thing hit him so quick he couldn't get out.

SLB: The fellows in the back?

IEH: They had no chance, whatsoever. It blew the whole tail of the aircraft off and I'm sure that they went with it.

SLB: So the next thing you know, you're hanging in the chute?

IEH: I'm hanging in the chute at about 29 thousand feet. I had an automatic opener [and it should have taken me down to about 14 thousand feet]. The reason I opened the chute that early was, when the plane blew up, I was close enough to it that it put me into a spin. I'd watched these parachutists do this and do that, so I thought: "Well, I'll do that too to see if I can't straighten myself out." Everything I did made me spin faster and I thought I was going to pass out and I didn't want to so, I thought: "I'm going to find out how good these parachute packers are." It worked--the parachute opened and it stopped my spinning in a hurry. I didn't realize it was going to take me 16 minutes to hit the ground, but after thinking about it, opening the parachute at that altitude was probably the smartest thing I ever did in the whole eleven and a half days I was over there. There was a fog bank starting to roll in, and it gave the bank [time to move in completely]. When I came down to the ground, it was right down through the fog bank. If I'd have waited for the barometric opener, I'd have been out in the clear with 30 thousand enemy troops around me, and

I wouldn't be here today.⁷

SLB: You talked to the FAC while you were actually hanging in the chute. Did he call you or did you [call him] ? Did you have a guard squawk or a beeper or what did you use?

IEH: I called him. I had a radio and a beeper in my parachute that started as soon as my parachute opened. I got down half way, probably 16 or 17 thousand feet when I saw this little 0-2 orbiting.⁸ When we go on a mission like this, all of our support aircraft are in position--in the area, or on the ground with their engines running. If something does happen, they'll be right there with us. But I saw this little 0-2, so I unzipped the survival vest, I've got a survival vest on you know and I unzipped it, took one of the radios out, and cranked up guard channel. I had no idea what his call sign was or anything, I just called, "0-2, 0-2, 0-2. Do you hear me?" He came back and said, "yes, where are you?" I said, "Well, I'm Bat-two-one-bravo and I'm in a parachute hanging about four or five thousand feet right above you."

SLB: [laughter] So you had the high ground on him, there...

IEH: Yes. He came back and said, "you gotta be...you know...kidding me." And I said, "No I'm not!" So he poured the power to that little thing and he came up and he orbited with me right down to the ground. While he's orbiting with me, he's calling in the other aircraft. So he was in there with the F-4s and Sandys, sterilizing the area. When I hit the ground I had a pretty clear area and there weren't too many people too close, if you get what I mean.

SLB: Where there people who could see you?

IEH: Yes, but I don't think they did because I broke out of the fog bank probably about 40 or 50 feet above the ground, hit the ground, and the

parachute collapsed immediately.

SLB: That was a good break. What did you do with your chute, and your helmet?

IEH: Well, you've watched all the World War Two movies where they used to dig a hole and bury it? Okay, when you've got 30 thousand enemy troops around you, you're not worrying about burying a parachute. I let it lay right where it was. I got out of the harness and into a little ditch and, as far as I know, that parachute is still laying there.

SLB: So you dumped your parachute, and headed off for the nearest cover, which was... ?

IEH: This all happened just about twilight; it was five o'clock in the afternoon. They had quite a big battle going on, and I don't know who was battling who, but there was a lot of shooting. I landed in a rice paddy, so I got up against this mound of dirt and laid there for two or three hours. It was a pretty good hiding place at the time--my whole body was below the ground level--and I laid there until it got real good and dark. While I was laying there I was looking to where I wanted to go. As soon as it got dark I just took off, got up in the jungle, and dug in for the night, because I knew they were going to pick me up the next morning. I didn't realize that the next morning was going to be eleven and a half days later.

SLB: Just to stick with the survival issue for a minute, what kind of equipment did you have?

IEH: Not too much. Where I was flying from, we could go up, do our job, and be back on the ground in about an hour and a half, two hours. It took us thirty minutes to get there, thirty minutes for the job and thirty minutes back. So, we didn't carry any food and we didn't carry any water--I had two radios, a first aid kit, a water bottle, flares [two kinds], a

knife. a .38 [caliber revolver] with twenty rounds of ammunition, and that's about it.

SLB: These are identical radios?

IEH: Yes, URC-64s--one of the greatest pieces of equipment the Air Force has ever made. The batteries lasted all eleven days.

SLB: So when we talk survival equipment, the radio was really the key?

IEH: The radio was the key in my situation. Without that radio, I was dead! [thumps table for emphasis]...dead!

SLB: Is that retrospective, and you're saying, "the longer things went, the more important the radio was," or is that something you were trained on?

IEH: No, after I was down about five or six hours, it suddenly dawned on me that it was the most valuable piece of equipment I had. I can remember back that we thought, this radio was pretty heavy and you've got two of them, and we had to go in and check the batteries every two or three days. We thought it one of these useless things you had to do, but if I had known then what I know now, I'd have taken that radio to bed with me every night. Without it, I'd have never gotten out of there.

SLB: We've got you on the ground now, up through the first night. I'd like to go through the days, not to ask you to recount them, because we agreed that the book has a very accurate chronology...

IEH: ...yes, yes, it is accurate.

SLB: ...right. I just want to go over some highlights or lowlights, day by day. After the first two days, you realized that you weren't going to get picked up.

IEH: Yes, because of the tremendously heavy ground fire.

SLB: Right. So you were holed up and I think on the third day, you decided to go out and get some food. Corn, wasn't it--I didn't realize they grew

corn in Vietnam.

IEH: Yes, I had four little ears of corn about as big around as your thumb. It's not too tasty, unless you're very hungry.

SLB: Had you run out of water?

IEH: Yes, in fact I didn't have any water with me at all. I didn't get water until, I think it was the third night. It started to rain and I had one of these rubberized escape and evasion maps that I just laid up on top of a bush. Then I got my plastic bottle out and filled it with the water--I got about two quarts, I guess. That brings up something that I tell all the people about survival: the first thing you want to worry about is water. Forget about the food. You can go forever without food, but you can go just two or three days without water.

SLB: And if you panic and drink bad water, you're likely to incapacitate yourself...

IEH: ...that's what they try to teach us in survival school, yes. Water is water and I had these Halizone tablets that I dumped in, but I drank the water out of the klong and I've just turned 71 years old, so it hasn't hurt me too much.

SLB: I think the fourth day, you reached kind of a low point: you've had weather delays, the OV-10 got shot down, and you had an encounter with a Vietnamese--a boy with a dog, who promptly went back and reported your whereabouts. I think it came down to one point where the FAC had to use marker rockets to keep them off your ass.

IEH: That's true. Without a doubt, there were times when I thought: "Oh, to hell with it." I'll just get up and walk out and say, "Hey, take me to your leader, I'm tired of this junk." But then, I had some very good friends that I had never met, that wouldn't let me quit--I'm talking about

the forward air controllers. After all this had happened, I guess he could feel it in my voice or something. I got a little perturbed with him because after all, I'm a colonel and he was a first lieutenant. He called me every thing in the book and he told me what he was going to do to me. He was the coach, the quarterback, whatever you want to call him, but I'll love him the rest of my life, believe me, [because] he wouldn't let me quit.

SLB: And the next day is the day that the Jolly Green got shot down?

IEH: I think it was two days later--and that was the second low point.

I thought: "It's just not worth it any more." You know, they were within a minute and a half, two minutes of picking me up and all at once that thing goes up in a ball of fire and I thought: "Aw hell, this thing's not worth it."

SLB: They had planned to pick you up and then go right on to pick Clark up, and that blew it for him, too.

IEH: Yes it did--in fact he was picked up the same way I was, in a sampan. He was shot down a couple of days behind me, picked up two or three days ahead of me. After the chopper was shot down, they went in and got him the same way.⁹

SLB: But the chopper getting shot down, that was the low point?

IEH: Well, I hate to see grown men cry...but I was a 53 year old lieutenant colonel and I cried...because here's six guys out there, giving their all to pull my butt out of there, and all at once, boom, they're gone. But again, the forward air controller came up on the radio and gave me a sermon you wouldn't believe. I made up my mind then, "Hell, I'm going to get out of here, regardless...."

SLB: You made your last foraging trip that day and, according to the book, it was a pretty hairy--you had trouble finding your hideout on the way back?

IEH: Yes, after six days. with no food, and sleep--I don't think I'd been to sleep over ten minutes [at any one time]. You found your mind wandering, and every once in a while I had to really sit down and talk to myself, "hey look, fellow, get your head back on straight," and thank God, I did.

SLB: After that they had the AC-130 come in and there was a lot of close air support. But the whole time that's happening, they're getting a lot of ground fire and they make a firm decision the next day, that there would not be [any helicopter pick up]. Did they tell you?

IEH: Well, they didn't tell me in that many words. He said, "Hey, look, we've got to change the whole program." Then the guy came up with this golf game, and as soon as I figured what he was talking about, I knew what their new deal was. They were going to walk me out of there, get me some place, but they had to get me out of there.

SLB: They concocted the golf match. Do you think anyone could have done that, or do you think being a navigator turned the tables?

IEH: It probably helped, but I'm a golf nut. I could play a course once and in six months I can [still] tell you the direction, the length, where the traps are, and they knew this. That's why they came up with the idea, I'm sure.

SLB: Because if they'd given you instructions in the clear, there'd have been somebody waiting for you.

IEH: Oh, absolutely. They were just walking me from hiding place to hiding place to hiding place to get me to where they wanted me. It worked out real good--hell, it was perfect!

SLB: One of the holes--really all these were, were compass legs--that particular compass leg, took you through a village and you had the unfortunate encounter with a Vietnamese. Did they walk you through that

village on purpose?

IEH: Yes, they sure did.

SLB: What was the rationale to have you out in the open like that?

IEH: Speed. They said it would take another two and a half, three hours if they take me around the village. They were trying to get me down there [to the river] as quickly as they could. [They had...] pretty much, sterilized the village.

SLB: They put some ordnance on it, huh?

IEH: Ah...Roger! The people that shot the chopper down were in this village and the Air Force decided to neutralize it. The day before I started to walk, they had come in with two or three F-4s with their smart bombs and they did a pretty good job on the village and we didn't think there was anybody left in the village at all. But coming through there, I guess it was midnight, I started to chase a chicken that I thought would taste real good. [laughter] The chicken got away and about that time, I just glanced around and saw something behind me. We had a very short confrontation and then I took off like a striped ass ape. He never followed me, so I guess... . This is one thing I'm not very proud of, believe me, but I got through the village and three or four hours later, I got down to the river.

SLB: You ended up resting in the bannana grove...

IEH: I got lost in the bannana grove! When I was in the bannana grove I didn't realize I was about a hundred and fifty yards from the river. I had to retrace my steps, come back out of it, and then skirt the cotton picking thing. Around four o'clock in the morning, just about daylight, I hit the river.

SLB: Somewhere in there, you walked off an embankment.

IEH: Yes, right after I came out of the bannana grove, I saw the river and I was so damn excited and I thought: "I've made it!" Again, going through survival school they tell you two or three things, one of them is never do anything in haste. I completely forgot that and took off to get to the river as quick as I could. I stepped off into nothing and fifteen or twenty feet later I'm laying up against a tree, my head is hurting [laughter]...and I've got a fractured arm. [laughter]

SLB: Well. things started heating up, because there were some bad guys in the area looking for you. Do you think they were pretty close to your footsteps?

IEH: I think so, because I got to the river bank, and they told me to get across the river as quickly as possible. I hadn't been on the other side of the river thirty minutes when twenty or so of these guys, walked right up to where I'd been sitting. I sat there watching them and I thought: "Oh no, here I go again." They beat the bushes for awhile and then all at once, they took off--they never came across the river.

SLB: When I read the book, I was thinking to myself, nine and a half days you've been doing this, and you're still only thirty minutes ahead of them. Did you have that feeling?

IEH: Yes, you bet. There were two or three nights early in the situation, where patrols walked within twenty feet of my original hiding place. In fact, they didn't even walk: they stopped, sat down, lit cigarettes and talked for fifteen, twenty minutes. I thought: "well, okay they know I'm here, but it took me a long time to find this hiding place. If you want me, you come in and get me." Finally, they just put their cigarettes out, got up, and walked away--that happened twice.

SLB: How were you able to relax enough not to make noise?

IEH: I was so scared, I couldn't make noise! And there's a little word in our English language, it's "pray"--and I did.

SLB: I'd imagine you did, more than once.

IEH: For eleven and a half days. In fact in my escape and evasion [talks], I've got the four "P's": panic, patience, plan, and pray.

SLB: I like that: panic, patience, plan and pray? This is also your quote, you tell them to take notes, because there might be an exam.

IEH: You bet...there might be an exam. [laughter] I think there is always somebody bigger than us that you've got to ask for help, once in awhile. I had no control over anything. You sit there and pray that what they're doing is right and when it starts happening, that everthing will work right.

SLB: Well. it did work and the second or third sampan you saw had Marines on it.

IEH: Navy SEAL team. [The leader was] Tom Norris--got the Congressional Medal of Honor, by the way.

[discussion returns to area denial bombing in support of the evasion effort]

SLB: So, anyhow, they brought some...

IEH: Yes, I think it was the second and third night, they came and laid this gravel--anti-personnel mines--they ringed me with those. And then the next night, things got pretty hot again and the forward air controller asked me, "How about bringing in some of the good stuff?" and I said, "Well, bring in as good as what you've got." They were going to drop it to blow it over this village, but as soon as they dropped it the damn breeze quit and started blowing a little bit the other way. I got two or three pretty good whiffs of it, and I've never been so sick in all my life. It was incapacitating gas, CBU something.¹⁰

SLB: A cannister bomb of some sort.

IEH: Yes, but I guarantee you one thing--it does the job. After he dropped it the second time, I told the forward air controller that if he ever did that again, I'd get up off of there and I'd shoot him, because it makes you awful sick.

SLB: We talked a lot about the cost of the rescue, the amount of effort, and the sacrifice. First of all, the cost in money.

IEH: I have no idea how much in dollars. First of all there's the cost of our fighting mens' lives. I lost five on my aircraft, there was five on the chopper,¹¹ Lt Clark's airplane--his commander was lost,¹² so we're talking about eleven or twelve people. And then the money that our government spent getting me out of there was absolutely phenomenal. Having been in the Air Force flying airplanes for thirty years, I know what it costs to even get an airplane off the ground. If the taxpayers and my neighbors knew what it cost them to pull me out of there, they'd probably shoot me. [laughter] But it has to make an American fighting man real proud to know, that our government, and our military, will go to any length, to save a fighting man's life. I've had a lot of people ask me, "You were a colonel, does that have...does that have anything to do with it?" I say, "Absolutely not." As long as he's a fighting man in our military, they're going to try and pull him out until he's either captured, or presumed dead. I don't care whether he's a private or a three star general--they are going to do it. I have flown a lot of these SAR missions, trying to pull other people out of there, and it doesn't even enter your mind. This is one of my buddies, let's go get him. Plus, people don't realize that to replace you, it would cost I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of dollars to train and get a man up to your experience level. They can't afford to lose you--that's the way they think.

SLB: I think the Army saw a cost to this in terms of the sorties that were not available to them. They were in the middle of the 1972 Spring invasion. Fire bases had been overrun, the 3rd ARVN Division was getting their butt kicked all the way down to Quang Tri...

IEH: ...sure, that's right...yes, that's the one I was caught in...

SLB: ...and you were in the middle of that. The advisors to the ARVN figured, "Hey, this isn't worth it for one guy; let's get these aircraft back." What do you think, is that a legitimate argument?

IEH: I don't know, I don't know...

SLB: I know you didn't think about it when you were on the ground.

IEH: No, in fact, I've never thought too much about it. I will say one thing: having followed the Vietnamese war very closely, even before I got over there, it was very evident to me that the ARVNs are good soldiers and good people. But, these people couldn't see any end to it and no matter which way they went, they weren't going to win. What I'm trying to say is, I don't think they fought as hard as we did when we had nothing to win. I'm trying to say I think the American military man is without a doubt, the finest in the world and they'd go in there and give their life to try to save somebody that they don't even know.

SLB: ...in fact, did it many times. Yes, I'm going to quote here from Air War in Vietnam, about the battle for Quang Tri, and Major Brookbank, who was the 3rd ARVN Division USAF ALO. Here's what he said about the Vietnam Air Force FACs: "They either fail to go to their assigned areas or they would not make contact with the ground commander," and the US FACs had to completely assume responsibility and basically, carry the load.¹³

IEH: Absolutely. I never talked to anybody but an American FAC. I'm going to say the same thing: we're up there to do our job, the way we were

trained to do our job, with nothing to win, and all they want to do is stay alive. They didn't have the heart, that's what it is.

SLB: Well, there is an argument that the eleven day effort, caused problems for the 3rd ARVN Division.¹⁴

IEH: It probably did. Because the war in my little immediate area stopped.

SLB: Right. they established a no-fire zone.

IEH: That's right, it was a no-fire zone.

SLB: It got to be apparent that conventional search and rescue just was not feasible in these heavy air defense environments, but why didn't the Air Force give up? What about the theories that because of your ICBM [Intercontinental Ballistic Missile] or ECM [electronic counter measures] knowledge, you were too sensitive of a source to fall into enemy hands?

IEH: We can go back further than that...I don't whether I should or not, but I will. I really shouldn't have been in Vietnam. I'd been in SAC for 25 years and had some pretty sensitive jobs. I had access to plans that not too many people had access to. And these plans are just like the golf courses I was talking about...I've never forgotten them, and I haven't yet. I know that that's one reason that the Air Force wanted to get me out of there. They didn't want me to go to Hanoi because they didn't know how strong I was, nor did I...I still don't.

SLB: Thank God, you didn't have to find out.

IEH: Yes, thank God...but no, they didn't want me to get caught because I was in targeting in SAC airplanes, and I was in targeting in SAC missiles.

In fact if I had've been caught, I'm quite sure that I'd never gotten to Hanoi. And I'm not going to say because of the Vietnamese or because of our military, but I'm quite sure that I'd never have gotten to Hanoi. The Air Force didn't tell me that. [but] I knew I was never going to get to Hanoi.

I made my mind up of that really early in the situation.

SLB: So for those combinations of reasons, you became the focus of [the largest rescue operation for one man, in the Vietnam War].

IEH: I don't know whether I should be proud of that, but it turned out to be that, yes.

SLB: Well the Air Force didn't give up and obviously you didn't give up, either. One of the reasons is you had the support from the FACs. They were on station...

IEH: ...twenty four hours a day, every day, six of them in four hour shifts. There was another reason I wasn't going to get caught, and she just walked out into the kitchen a few minutes ago. [gestures towards Mrs. Hambleton] I just made up my mind I couldn't do this to her; it wouldn't have been fair to her.

SLB: How about the fear motivation? Did that... ?

IEH: Fear? No, no fear whatsoever...

SLB: Not in terms of motivation?

IEH: No...terror!...terror! [laughter] I guess that would come into it a little bit. Seriously, I'm not trying to make myself sound any better than anybody else, but after about the second day, I had no fear whatsoever. The first two days, I was scared to death. But after I'd gone through two days of this junk, fear just never entered into it.

SLB: The reason I asked that is because when you have a good scare put into you, you can move a little faster just at that moment. But, eleven days? I don't think you could sustain it.

IEH: Well, I slowed down a little bit every day, and after eleven days, I wasn't in very good shape.

SLB: Do you mind talking about the various injuries you had accumulated?

IEH: Oh, I had a lot of flak injuries, and had a fractured bone in my arm and a big cut on my leg. When I got in the hospital, they had both arms bandaged, both legs bandaged...

SLB: ...obviously, you were a little dehydrated...

IEH: ...yes, and malnutrition...and I had a big scar on my back where that Vietnamese guy got me with a knife. But other than that, there was nothing life threatening. They wanted to chop this finger off when I got in the hospital but I wouldn't let them. The doctor chewed me out about that, and I said look, "I know more about my healing conditions than you do," so I've still got it and it still works good.

SLB: I want to talk about the kind of support that she [Mrs. Hambleton] got from the Air Force, if you don't mind.

IEH: I don't mind a bit. In fact, I'll be happy to, because I think it was absolutely fantastic. Four or five hours after I was shot down, [they] came out and gave her the news. About two hours later, she got a telegram from the casualty center at Randolph [about] what had happened, and what was going on.¹⁵ She got a telegram every day for the first six or seven days, plus they gave her a toll free number that she could call anytime that she wanted to. In between the telegrams, if anything would come up that they thought she should know, they called her. This is for the full eleven and a half days I was down--they did a beautiful job! [She got a lot of support] from them, and our friends here in town. There was somebody in the house with her twenty four hours a day, every day I was down, with the exception of one night [when] she said, "This is it, go on home."

SLB: We talked about this: you were getting support yourself on the ground, but there was also support back here.

IEH: Oh, absolutely. Yes, the Air Force took very, very good care of her.

This is the greatest fraternity in the world, and everybody is a friend, even though you don't know them. As long as we have the same uniform on, the Air Force takes care of its own. These guys that were giving her information, they didn't know her from Adam. Also, while they were doing this for my wife, they were also doing the same thing for my father, back in Illinois.

SLB: To go back to your own experience, a lot of guys came out of the woodwork to try to lend a hand. Had they not done that, and come up with the hairbrained, but successful...[golf match].

IEH: I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be here. You bet, and that's what I said: this fraternal spirit is something that you just won't believe.

SLB: [After the rescue and medical treatment], didn't you drop back through Korat?

IEH: Yes, I went back to Korat for six or seven days. My commander wanted me to come back up there and talk to the guys, so I went back up there for a week, and talked to every unit on the base--what it was like on the ground, you know, and again, "take notes, you might have an exam next week." The Air Force took real good care of me and nobody would let me buy a dinner or a drink, or anything.

SLB: That was your first chance to show the lessons learned, and you're still doing that today. As we speak, you've got trips scheduled...

IEH: Yes, I sure am...I'm trying to. I've got two or three more scheduled here in the next couple of months, right.

SLB: Right, and I've got your four "P's"--would you talk about those?

Is this something that you've put together over the years, or is this kind of the same message you had to start?

IEH: After I got back and started talking, I kind of forgot about it until

two and a half, three years ago [when] it finally dawned on me again [that I was] losing probably the most important part of anything I say to these guys.

SLB: What did you mean with your first "P"--panic?

IEH: Don't! ...panic. As soon as you get in a situation like this, take a few minutes, sit down, get your head on straight. Don't do anything in haste, don't do anything rash--if you do, you're going to die. The plan part of it is--I was very fortunate, because my people had a plan and I made up my mind to go along with it. I stayed in this one spot six days, not because I wanted to, but because the FAC told me to. He said, "Look! We know exactly where you are. I can drop a smoke bomb, and I'll hit you right between the eyes...if you move a hundred yards, we've got to look for you again." So, when the plan comes out, whether it's yours or somebody else's, stick to it! If you start ad libbing, then boy, you're dead. Patience: nothing is going to happen in the next three or four minutes. It takes time to have all of these guys back there get the plan in operation. So you've got to wait for them.

SLB: At least in historical perspective, that's important because in Vietnam, the majority of successful rescues were within the first hour, because they had rescue aircraft on station.

IEH: Yes, true, especially in Vietnam. All of our support aircraft were in the air, or on the ground with the engines running, within twenty or thirty minutes of you...but you have to wait for them. Then, after everything else, you've always got one Person that I think you can depend upon. Once and awhile you've got to ask Him for help. That's the fourth "P". I'm a firm believer that, sometimes when you need help, you've got to ask for it.

SLB: This got a lot of publicity at the time, and depending on who wrote

the story, they took a different angle. They would say that you had credited God with seeing you through, or you'd credited good equipment and good training, or you'd credited the organization--the Air Force. But basically, what you're saying is those all fit under these categories?

IEH: They all go together, everyone of them. Maybe I'm wrong, and I don't think I am, because I'm sitting here alive and talking about it, but with the four "P's", and the people you've got backing you up, you can't lose.

SLB: Any other lessons learned that come out?

IEH: Just one: don't ever think you can't do something. You can do what you have to do, when you have to do it, if you set your mind to it.

SLB: How about a few minutes on the book and the film? The book, I believe, is a good chronology of events?

IEH: Yes, absolutely perfect...

SLB: Did you know Anderson [the Author of Bat 21] for a long time?

IEH: No. I wrote the book originally, [and worked on it for] two or three years, but I couldn't sell [it]. Anderson heard about it--now Anderson is also a retired full bird colonel [USAF] who had become a very established writer. I went out and talked to him in San Diego, and he said, "I think, that if you and I can come to an agreement, I can take this thing and sell it." I said, "Well, I can't sell it so, come on, what's your agreement?" So we wrote up a contract and as soon as the publisher found out that he had it, then they started calling us. From then on its just gone...

SLB: You've got the one literary device of the many FACs being rolled into one character...

IEH: There was a reason for that. Between the two of us, we decided that this would also make a good movie, and we were writing a screen play at the same time that he was rewriting the book. We finally sold it to a

production company out in Hollywood, and the producer was going to sign a pretty good sized check for the first option. when he told us: "Well, if you don't make this man black, I won't even talk to you."

SLB: That's the imaginary FAC. He was looking for an angle to...

IEH: ...sell tickets, right. After we talked, I said, "eleven days, six a day, sixty six, there could have been any number of blacks... ." Anyway, we're sitting there watching this producer and he's got a check, and it's only for fifty thousand dollars, and I looked at Andy and Andy looked at me, and I said, "Okay, he's black...whatever."

SLB: Well, it turned out that they did make a film. We read the reviews together yesterday, and it's a hell of a film. But isn't it fair to say that it's not chronologically accurate, and some of the ideas and time are compressed?

IEH: That's a correct statement, simply because they had compressed it. They took eleven and a half days and put it into three. They put some Hollywood in it and some of the scenes are fictitious, but the story is there. One of the things that I didn't like about the movie and still don't, is the language they used in it. I talked to him [the producer] about it for a long time and his only comment was, "Hey, look, we've got to make it an "R" rated movie or people won't go to see it." Which I disagreed with, but it's his business, not mine, and he also said, "Look, I put up ten million dollars. It's my ten million dollars, and I'm going to do it anyway I damn well please."

SLB: If we could zero in on the military professionals--they're going to be able to spot the fact that there's a lot of ticket selling, Hollywood, whatever--but what message would you ask them to look for in the film?

IEH: We didn't start out to make a Vietnamese war movie...we started out to

make a search and rescue, escape and evasion movie. We tried to bring into the movie, a relationship that can build up between two people that don't know each other, have never seen each other, and probably never will. I'm talking about me and the FAC. And I think that comes over very well in the movie. That is what we tried to do, and I think we did it. But along with that, I think that if we could get to these professionals--I'm talking about the movie makers--to get them to listen to the [military] professionals, especially in a movie like this, it would have been a heck of a lot better.

SLB: When Gene Hackman advertises this, he says it's a movie about friends, not enemies.¹⁶ That's a pretty good quote, isn't it?

IEH: I think that's a very good quote, you bet. I've met Gene Hackman, he's one of the finest people you'd ever meet. He enjoyed making the movie, a whole lot, and I talked to him at length about it.

SLB: Anything else you want to add?

IEH: I'm going to say something I said a few minutes ago. Don't believe that you can't do something--all you've got to do is make up your mind and you can do anything you have to do. I was 53 years old when this thing went on and I hadn't ever dreamt that I would be able to go through an ordeal like this and come out of it. Don't quit, as long as there's somebody there, let them help...and again, I say: our military is the greatest damn fraternity in the world--we don't have to bow our heads to anybody.

[end of tape]

ENDNOTES: APPENDIX 3

1. Col Hambleton's biography lists 43 missions in Korea, and 63 in Vietnam, suggesting a total of 106.

2. Col Hambleton refers to the 390th Strategic Missile Wing, at Davis-Monthan AFB, in Tucson, Arizona. The 390th's weapons system was the Titan II intercontinental ballistic missile; the unit has since been deactivated. This writer briefly served in that wing with Col Hambleton in 1972-1973.

3. Strategic Air Command and Tactical Air Command pilots have had a rivalry of sorts for years. SAC flying tends to be high altitude, straight and level, with long missions; TAC flying tends to be low altitude, maneuver oriented, with short sorties. In jest, one speaks of the SAC "checklist mentality," or of being SACumcised. TAC pilots are expected to live up to a cavalier attitude associated with "fighter jocks." For a harsher and more serious perspective on this, see Boughton, *Going Downtown*, pp. 102-107.

4. Carl Berger, *et al.*, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1961-1975*, presents a good synopsis of survival training at pp. 306-307. The school in the Phillipines Hambleton refers to was the PACAF jungle survival school.

5. The SAM that shot Hambleton's aircraft down was almost certainly an SA-2 rather than the mobile SA-3. The "mobility" inferred here was the forward deployment of SA-2s into the DMZ area in preparation for the Spring invasion. See Mann, *The 1972 Invasion of Military Region 1*, pp. 10-11.

6. Important choke points on the Ho Chi Mihn trail between the lower panhandle of North Vietnam and the plains of Laos. See *The Effects and Impact of Air Power: Veitnam, 1965-1968, Vol. I*, pp. 7-4 through 7-6.

7. The barometric opener was set at a standard 14 thousand feet to get the airman out of the thin atmosphere before the parachute opened but still give him time to get oriented for a safe landing. Hambleton was about twice that high when he elected to pull his ripcord.

8. Actually, USAF FACs at that point in the war were flying OV-10s rather than the venerable but obsolete O-2s. The FAC Hambleton talked to first was Captain Jimmie D. Kempton, piloting an OV-10 out of DaNang Air Base. See Lavalley, *Airpower in the 1972 Spring Invasion*, pp. 36-38.

9. Clark was picked up by a SEAL team that moved 2,000 meters through the jungle. Hambleton was picked up in a sampan by the team leader and one Vietnamese. Both rescues were made by Lt. Thomas R. Norris, who received the Congressional Medal of Honor, as Hambleton points out later in the interview. See *America's Medal of Honor Recipients*, pp. 117-118.

10. Probably a CBU-30A--a cluster bomb unit filled with tear gas. See Tilford, *Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia, 1961-1975*, p. 95.

11. The five lost on Hambleton's aircraft included the pilot and four electronic warfare officers; only he survived. The toll on the rescue

helicopter was actually six, because there was a combat photographer onboard as well as a full crew of five. See Ernest, *History of the 3rd Air Rescue and Recovery Group*, 1 April-30 June 1972, p. 5-8.

12. Captain Henderson, who was captured and spent the rest of the war as a POW. Lavalley, p. 41.

13. Quoted from page 144 of that book, which was previously published as an official monograph (see Lavalley, in this paper's bibliography).

14. The 3rd ARVN Division was the unit defending Northernmost Quang Tri province, where Hambleton went down. In this writer's opinion, the best published account of the invasion is by Turley, *The Easter Offensive*.

15. Hambleton refers to the USAF Military Personnel Center at Randolph AFB, Texas. The Center runs a clearing house for information on casualties, including those missing in action, prisoner of war, or unresolved--as Hambleton was for almost 12 days.

16. Actually, Hackman says, "War isn't always about enemies." This is the film's advertising tag line, and Hambleton finds it quite appropriate from his own experience.

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